Prologue

It was completely dark inside the room. A blue penlight's glow was moving around. A light too weak to illuminate the entire room. The blue light shone on the floating silhouette of the girl holding the penlight.

It's raining outside. The voice of the young girl is sweeping somewhere throughout the lonely sounds of the falling rain.

"...This is a story I heard from my uncle.

One summer my uncle went to the mountain with a friend. They walked, aiming to see the summit of that mountain."

She paused for a moment.

"...And you know, the weather was nice, but they lost their way, even though they had been there before.

They should have arrived to the top in about three hours, but no matter how much they walked, they couldn't reach it.

Strange as it may seem, they kept on walking, and then a completely unknown mountain ridge appeared above them and they couldn't understand where they were anymore. Anyway, under these circumstances they decided to return and took the way from which they came, but after they walked for a while the same place appeared before them.

No matter how many times they walked that way, they always came to the same ridge. Eventually it got dark and they had no choice, but to camp at that place."

No one was able to open their mouths now.

"Night came. They sat by the campfire, chatting, when they heard a man's voice. A voice asking for help. The two of them looked around for the voice's

owner, but couldn't see anyone. Trying to call for him didn't give a result either.

And just when they thought that it was just their imagination, they heard the voice again. This time it was closer than before, they searched again, but still there was no one around.

The same thing happened many times again, and the voice was steadily closing in to them. At the end the voice got so close to them that it was coming from the campfire. Someone's breath, footsteps and even clothes' rubbing sound could be heard, but still they couldn't see anyone there. As anyone would, they got a very bad feeling about that, so my uncle's friend began chanting a 'namuamidabutsu' prayer.

All the sounds started to tone down.

The two of them couldn't sleep that night at all and waited for dawn. In the morning they realized that near the camp there was a cairn."

"A cairn?"

"Yeah. When a man died in the mountain, they piled up some stones at that place instead of a grave.

That's called a cairn.

——You see, that cairn was about an average man's height. It was impossible to miss it. Still they didn't notice it the day before.

The dead person probably felt lonely and tried to invite them...or something like that.

I still wonder what could have happened if my uncle's friend didn't do the 'namuamidabutsu' prayer.”

Yuuri finished her story, leaving the rain's sound to be the only sign of activity around us.

She quietly turned off the penlight.

Another two lights remained inside the room.

"Next is Mai."

Keiko suggests from the darkness.

As the expert, I started my story.

"...It's a story I heard when I was a grade student.

On a street at night there was a woman going back home. That was in the Autumn, so her body got cold midway and she felt she needed to go to the toilet. She was just passing near a park and thought she could use the public toilet there.

A public bathroom at night doesn't feel right, does it? Because it's dark and all...

Although she didn't want to, she went into the restroom. Then, she heard a voice calling out of thin air."

I made my high-pitched voice tremble.

"'Do you want a red mantle?'

'No-o!'

Someone screamed.

That woman was totally frightened and left the restroom.

But somehow the door was stuck.

The door jolted and again she heard the same voice, 'Do you want a red mantle?'.

She hit the door with all her might, but it didn't open. And when she heard the voice for the third time she answered,'No, I don't want it'.

Right after that the door opened quickly."

No one could speak. Only a weak rough noise of breathing mingled with the sound of the rain is audible.

I continued the story.

"The woman got out of the restroom in a haste and was so scared that she just couldn't go home by herself, then she saw two patrol policemen passing by.

She greeted the policemen and told them about what happened while going home. They told her, 'That was probably a molester who had hidden himself

somewhere inside the bathroom. We can't catch him by ourselves.', so she had to go inside again.

Before she entered the toilet again the police man told her 'When the voice asks you again, please say yes.'

Then the woman entered the toilet and soon after that she heard the creepy voice say 'Do you want a red mantle?' She, as instructed, answered with 'Yes'. And at the same instant a terrible scream filled the midnight silence.

The door opened quickly, and the woman there was dead."

Raindrop sounds. Just raindrops...

"She was covered in red just like she was wearing a red mantle.

She was dyed in deep red blood. Her body was pierced so that it looked like the pointer of a compass, full of small holes everywhere."

Everyone screamed.

"No!"

"Waah!"

Hearing the screams, I turned off the penlight.

Only one light was left.

Only one blue light was still shining... Michiru started her story.

"It's a story about this school..."

The blue light is shining on Michiru's hair, her hair that is hanging down from around her face.

"Mai, have you heard the story of the old school building?"

I turn my face, shaking my head in a negative answer.

"Strange.

At the ex-school building there is a wooden building at the opposite side of the sports ground. The half-collapsed building."

"...So.

It wasn't collapsed. That's where the reconstruction stopped."

"Why...?"

Michiru smiled like a ghost.

"Curse..."

"C-c-curse?"

"Yes...

That building was cursed... a lot of strange incidents happened there. Every year a teacher and a pupil died there... Was it a fire or an incident, only bad things happened there."

I saw that right after I entered this school. The old building had half-collapsed. It was full of broken glass and walls around. Really, that building is a scary place.

"The new school building was built ten years ago.

That time, when they had to demolish the old building to start the construction, strange things happened. A machine stopped and workers got ill. But still they tried to break the west wall, and the roof fell down. All the way from the second floor. All of the workers on the first floor died."

Diseases, injuries, incidents...

"Thereupon the construction was suspended. It was left like that, with the west side collapsed, for a long time.

After that unpleasant things continued to happen. A child from the neighborhood was found dead in the ex-building, three days after that a teacher committed suicide there...

...The demolition was restarted last year in order to rebuild the gym. But again only the half of it got demolished, before the work got suspended. The same as last time. A machine broke, a worker got..."

...huh.

"Once a truck went out of control and drove through the sports ground during class. Two students died and seven were severely injured. It was on the newspapers too."

...I don't like this.

Michiru keeps on in a low voice.

"My senpai's friend saw a man's ghost at the ex-building...

A person's white shadow was looking at her from the second floor, she said. The road around the school fence isn't a place to walk at night. When I was walking my dog at night at that street I felt someone looking at me. When I turned around, from the window of a half-collapsed classroom a white silhouette was..."

"It can't be..."

Keiko raises her voice.

"It's true. ...and that person was waving his hand like he was inviting me. I got the feeling that I shouldn't go inside the old school so I left staggering on my feet."

"A-and..?"

"That's all. When I started walking, my dog burst out barking with great energy, so I got back there. I looked again at the window, but the person wasn't there anymore."

"Hyaa..."

"...I'm turning it off."

Michiru said quietly. The room got quiet again.

With a weak sound Michiru's penlight disappeared. The vicinity was wrapped up in the darkness and the sound of the rain.

Keiko says with a hazy voice from inside the darkness.

"One..."

Her voice is trembling. After we tell the ghost stories and turn off the lights we have to count upwards from one. The last one should be a ghost.

Yuuri's voice.

"Two..."

Mine.

"Three..."

Michiru's low voice.

"Four..."

There are four of us. Are we about to hear a fifth voice?

We strained our ears.

- Raindrops*

"FIVE"

KYAAA!!!

We all screamed, horrified at once. We fell into panic with agonizing cries.

What was that!? This voice!?!

Keiko and the others embrace themselves in fear.

"No-o, no-o！"

At that instant, the dark room was lit up. Near the door there is a light switch. Under the small green light there is a group of unsociable looking students among the desks. In the school basement there is a Audio-Video room, that's where we are. We turned around, and saw a tall boy standing near the door, looking at us with interest.

He has an impressively beautiful face. His hair as dark as night, and a deep gloomy look in his eyes. With well-matched black clothes. His white face and hands are like the melting moonlight inside the twilight abyss.

Without a uniform. Is he an exchange student?

Keiko asked, "W...was that you?"

"Yes... did I do something wrong?"

A nice peaceful voice.

Michiru sits down relieved.

"Ahh, that surprised me. I thought I was going to die."

"Excuse me. The lights were off so I thought there was nobody in here, but suddenly I heard voices... so I just.."

"That's... it's alright!"

Keiko says joyfully,

"Are you an exchange student?"

He paused a little.

"...is it like that, I wonder..."

What's with the pause?

"A first-year?"

"...I'm seventeen this year."

A strange way to answer.

"So, you are a senpai."

Keiko says that with a lively voice. She is the kind that is attracted only by the looks. Actually this guy is really handsome. A tall figure. Long legs too. And again, a beautiful face.

...But I kind of feel something weird from him. It's just a feeling, but I can tell we don't match.

Michiru says with a smiling face.

"We are sorry to have surprised you too! We were telling ghost stories."

"Heeh…"

He said and smiled.

"Would you mind if I joined you?"

Everyone screamed in delight.

"Please, please... Sit here."

Michiru pulled his arm.

"What's your name?"

"Shibuya..."

Keiko's eyes formed a heart at that moment.

"Shibuya-senpai, do you like ghost stories too?"

"Sort of."

He smiled.

Everyone screamed happily again, but after all I had this feeling of unrest coming from him. I wonder why, but I didn't really like him.

"Shibuya-san..."

I said, and he turned at my direction.

Mm? As I said his face was expressing a smile. But I felt it. This guy had something hidden under the surface. His eyes aren't smiling.

"What are you doing in a place like this?"

"I had something to take care of."

"Then do it faster, because we're going home now."

"Eeh!"

Keiko and Michiru exclaimed, dissatisfied. Even Yuuri who has been quiet until now, pulls my uniform.

"That Mai...Don't worry about it senpai.

What is it that you have to do here? We will help you!"

"...Ah, it's only some tape dubbing..."

Shibuya-senpai once again forces his smile.

"The truth is, I'm in a hurry right now. How about, next time you tell ghost stories, you let me join in?"

"Then, tomorrow after school!"

Keiko wags her tail.

"Alright. Where?"

"Our homeroom! Room 1-F!"

He smiled, bowing his head in assent.

"Okay, then we are off. Goodbye."

Michiru stood in an unusually graceful manner.

"Take care."

"Yess.(♥)"

Everyone was in high spirits, Keiko and the others were pleased with themselves, but for me, I was the only one unsatisfied and thinking about what had just happened in the A/V room.

Chapter 1 - Pressure Falling

1

The following day had nice weather and the sakura trees on the road to school were forming a beautiful white tunnel.

Along with the nice weather I, for some reason, was feeling better too. In the morning, when I saw the sky clearing away and the sun rising, I suddenly felt myself full of energy, and went to school earlier than usual.

I was passing through the tunnel of roadside sakura trees on my way to school when I suddenly felt like seeing the old school building.

The old school building was standing on the opposite side of the sports ground facing the new one. A wooden, half-demolished building. A building that had many bad rumors going around about it. Everyone considered it a haunted mansion.

Are the rumors true?

I decided to go.

Maybe it is true. Being abandoned for a long time, the windows are clouded in dust. More than half of them are broken so one could see the gloomy inside of the school beyond them.

Dark hole openings in the windows. I feel something different from these holes, like they belong to another place, a different world than the one I know.

A distorted tiled roof. Half of the building is covered in a blue sheet. That originally beautiful blue color is soiled too, deeply ruined.

I approached the old school building.

The entrance way has an old-fashioned door with a glass window, which is clouded and broken too. A transparent vinyl put there is looking rather lonely.

I peeped in through that window.

Inside the entrance way the color of dusk is dominating. A rattly shoe shelf disposed to the faint light is standing there like a gravestone. A terrible amount of dust. A spider's nest. Its threads are dusty too. A completely dilapidated building.

Broken glass is scattered on the floor, something that looks like an old bowl, and other garbage is all over the place. Ruins. Dilapidated building. A haunted house. An old school building of bad rumors.

Peeping in, I suddenly notice a strange thing inside the entrance way.

What could it be?

A black machine.

Pretty big, looks like a video camera. Set on top of a tripod.

Why is such a thing here I wonder, I have to make sure what it is.

Spontaneously, I put my hand on the door knob.

A very dusty and rough sense of touch.

The door opened with a very unpleasant creak to let me inside.

I entered right after the door opened. As I thought, it's a video camera. It can't be... someone lost this?

I got closer to the camera.

Why would there be a camera?

This thing totally puzzles me. It's like seeing a car stopped in the middle of the living room of a friend's house.

Er, what is this?

Just when I stretched my hands towards the video camera...

"Who is it?"

A man's sharp voice.

In that ex-school building of bad luck. In that dark entrance way, inside that completely dilapidated building, there just when I saw a strange thing and felt curious...

At that time all of a sudden I heard a voice, it's impossible not to get surprised.

Of course I was surprised. Not just surprised. I literally jumped back. While jumping I unintentionally crashed into the almost collapsed shoe shelf.

At that moment the shoe shelf swayed turning around.

On my vision's edge I see a man's figure standing at the door.

I try to avoid the shoe shelf that was inclining towards me for the second time.

At the spur of the moment I trip and fall and the shoe shelf collapses grazing my uniform skirt, on top of that it directly hits the video camera... I take an innocent breath… that surprised me...

Huh, I thought I was going to get caught under it.

Taking a breath of relief, I turned to face the man just like a rogue would in front of two monks.

Not good.

Now it is completely broken. The previously broken shoe shelf. And the man is lying on the floor.

"Are you alright?"

I rushed over to him. And at the same time heard a voice.

"What's wrong?"

A man's voice.

The one who rushed over here from the door is the exchange student who made me feel unrestful since yesterday. Shibuya. Today he isn't wearing a uniform either. He is as black as ever.

He ran over to check the collapsed man near me.

"Lin?"

Does he know him? Saying that, he notices me, giving me an intense look.

"What happened?"

"Ah, that's……"

Just when I was about to answer the fallen man raised his body.

"Are you hurt?"

Shibuya asks him.

"Yes..."

He mutters.

Below the long forelock that is covering the upper part of his face, there is a red line flowing down.

My voice gets nervous.

"……Did you cut yourself somewhere?"

The blood falling from his chin is forming a circle of dots on the floor.

What should I do!

"I am very sorry! I was surprised and..."

I quickly try to give him a hand, but Shibuya stops me.

Using his perfectly calm hands, he is checking the state of the fallen man's injury.

"It's a small cut... Anywhere else?"

"I am alright."

The injured man gets up. He bends a little when his weight gets to his legs.

"Can you stand? How are your legs?"

"……Everything is okay."

But still he has quite a sickly look on his face. A thick layer of sweat is running down his forehead.

Not knowing what to do, I just stand there nervously.

"I am really sorry. But suddenly hearing your voice I was totally surprised..."

"He already told you, it's okay", Shibuya says in a cold voice.

I counter with an even colder look.

"We met yesterday, didn't we?"

"That's right."

But is it alright for me to give him such a grave look? After all this man got injured because of me getting surprised.

"That's right, but what's more important now is, is there a hospital or a doctor nearby?"

"Right after the school gate..."

"Take me there."

Saying this, Shibuya supports his friend with a shoulder.

I also try to help him, but he pushes off my hand with his arm.

What's with this guy!

Glaring at me he says:

"I'm fine. Your help is unneeded."

...This guy... What's with his attitude. In the first place all this happened because you scared me like that. And I, like a kind person, lent you a hand...

"Lin, can you walk?"

"Yes, I am okay."

Shibuya takes a look at me.

"What's your name?"

"Taniyama..."

"Then, Taniyama-san, I will be alright from here on, you can return to the classroom."

"But.."

"I should let you know that the school bell just rang."

Heh?

I got up early and I'm still late?

Getting up early, being scared to death, these two guys almost freaking me out and on top of that I'm late for school?

Ah, I should have never approached the old building.

As I thought, this place is full of bad luck!

2

Even though I ran in all my haste I was totally late for school. And as if to finish me off, the teacher had to scold me in front of the whole class... It couldn't get any worse. Thanks to this I was in a bad mood throughout the whole day.

School ended.

And when I was about to go home, Keiko and the others gathered around my desk.

"Hey, Mai, are you going home?"

"Why?"

"Weren't we going to meet with yesterday's exchange guy?"

"Shibuya?"

"Yes, let's meet him."

Don't joke around. I don't want to see that guy's face for a while.

"I'm going home." I made it clear to them that I won't go.

"Whyy? Mai... You've changed."

Even Michiru nods.

"What a weirdo you are. That guy's got a godlike coolness, don't you think so?"

No, I don't. They are too excited. I too, think he's got a pretty face, but that's all.

Recognizing me as a weirdo, Michiru says, "Well, that's fine. The lesser rivals, the better."

"That's right. We'll be the only ones to enjoy his enchanting eyes."

Keiko is really happy.

"You really don't want to come?", Yuuri adds in mistrust.

"Are you sure? You were quite interested yesterday."

With these words Michiru smoothed down her uniform, having nothing more to say.

Keiko too gives up on me and changes the topic.

"But I was really surprised yesterday. The atmosphere was so tense wasn't it? I thought that ghosts had appeared for real."

"Me too."

"Today, we'll tell stories again."

"But where? We won't get in the right mood here. What about we borrow the A/V room again?"

You're really into it, aren't you?

"Yeah, it isn't dark enough here. The A/V room? The school's mixer room."

"That sounds okay."

...Just when they were talking about this...

"Wait a minute."

The voice we heard is that of our class rep, Kuroda Naoko-san.

Somehow, she always looks nervous. It's been half a month since I entered this school, but I still haven't even talked to her.

"Ah, Kuroda-san, goodbye." Yuuri turns to her with an innocent smile.

"It isn't goodbye. What were you talking about just now?"

Kuroda-san seems to be in a bad mood.

But we didn't insult you or anything.

Then I replied,

"We're going to tell ghost stories today. That's what we were talking about."

Keiko poked me.

I feel Kuroda-san's murderous intent.

What's with her?

At exactly that moment, Shibuya shows his face from the door.

"Is Taniyama-san here?"

Kuroda-san turns to his direction.

"What year are you? What are you doing here?"

"Ah, I had an arrangement with these girls..."

"Arrangement? About the ghost stories?"

"That's right...?"

Hearing Shibuya's answer, Kuroda-san turns at us without fail.

"Didn't I tell you to stop doing this?!"

...Ah? What's with this girl?

She angled her eyes.

"No wonder I've been having headaches since this morning."

"Ha-a?"

I incline my head doubtfully. What is she talking about?

"Taniyama-san, I am sensitive to spirits. I have headaches when a lot of them gather. I am having headaches today. Spirits have definitely gathered here."

"……Ha-a……"

"Didn't you know? When you tell ghost stories spirits gather. These are mainly low-level spirits. But even if they are low-level ones, when a lot of them gather they attract stronger spirits. You will be in trouble if that happens."

"..Haa..."

……WHAT'S WITH THIS GIRL?!

"So you shouldn't think of telling ghost stories as 'fun'."

Then she turns to Shibuya.

"It would be quite troublesome if senpai did it too. I'd have to do an exorcism," Kuroda-san says that with a thoughtful expression.

Shibuya shrugs his shoulders.

"Isn't it just your imagination?"

"That's why people who can't sense spirits are annoying."

Her tone is persistently intense.

Shibuya looks at her with a strong intent.

"You, if you really can sense them then do you sense something from the old school building?"

"Old school building? Ah, it seems spirits of those who died during the war are gathering there." Kuroda-san says quickly.

"Died during the war……?"

"Right. I often see a man's shadow looking at me from the windows and it looks like a man from the war"

"Heeh, which war?"

"Of course, the World War II. During the war there was a hospital on that place. The spirits of the dead nurses can be seen there. It had been air-raided once. Therefore a lot of injured spirits can be seen too."

"Awesome."

Shibuya says with a sarcastic smile.

"I didn't know this was a hospital during the war. I heard that this school was here since pre-war days. And before that there was a medical faculty, wasn't there?"

……A really hard personality……

Kuroda-san purses her lips. Then her face gets red.

"I woudn't know such a thing. Anyway, I've seen them. A person unable to sense them wouldn't understand."

Kuroda-san doesn't give up until the end.

"The school principal is bothered that the ex-building's demolition failed and was complaining. Are you here to exorcise it?"

"...it isn't so simple。We'll do it when possible."

"I see."

Shibuya responds coldly, and turns to us.

"Since here is no good, let's go elsewhere?"

"Still continuing with such a thing!"

Kuroda-san snaps at Shibuya with incredible force.

But Shibuya completely unconcerned comes to us making Keiko and the others restless again.

"Let's……"

This extremely timid voice is Yuuri's.

"Let's put it off for today?"

"I agree...I'm not in the mood for it."

Keiko loses her enthusiasm too.

What's happening? No one is even looking at him, they will miss the chance for an intimate experience with their cool senpai.

But still Michiru says, "...Shibuya-senpai, sorry. After all..."

"I see."

Shibuya nods in assent.

"Then some other time."

Saying that, he raises his hand. Looking at the seemingly-pleased Kuroda-san he says, "You are satisfied too, right?"

"...What are you talking about?"

"It's okay if you don't know. ——Taniyama-san, please."

Shibuya invites me.

Keiko and the others throw a surprised glance at me.

"What is it?"

"Do you have a spare minute?"

He says with a smile on his face. Keiko and company do not notice his negative expression. My back is being watched reproachfully while leaving the room.

3

"Who's that girl?"

Shibuya asks me while walking in a brisk step before me, where is he taking me I wonder.

"I don't know. Today was the first time I spoke with her. She seems suspicious to me for some reason."

"Yeah. Is she really a medium?"

He asked with a thoughtful expression.

"Well, she said it herself, didn't she? By the way, is the person from this morning alright?"

"About that."

Shibuya turns to face me with his cold, indifferent expression.

"He sprained his left ankle. It is apparently in very bad condition, so he won't be able to stand for a while."

"……Oh…… I'm really sorry……"

I say this, but still I wonder if I really should be apologizing to him.

"Well…… Is he an acquaintance of yours?"

"Wasn't it obvious?"

Shibuya glances at me with ridicule in his eyes.

"What kind of acquaintance?"

I ask.

He was giving me a strange feeling. That guy from the morning was over the hill no matter how you look at him. That same person was talking to his partner, the sixteen year old Shibuya, in a polite manner, while on the opposite side

Shibuya was always talking in an excessively rude way. Isn't this a reversal?

Shibuya replies with his peaceful voice in a casual manner.

"Assistant."

Oh. What an arrogant assistant this is. Would you normally talk to your master in such a rude tone?

"Your boss seems to have a rather strict personality."

I say this with a grain of sarcasm. I don't know if it was a sprained ankle or a broken bone, but I had already relieved myself from that responsibility by lending him a hand.

"But it wasn't only me who was responsible for your master's injury. He was the one who surprised me--"

"It's the opposite."

The opposite? What is? I didn't surprise him for sure.

Shibuya speaks curtly—

"I am the boss. He is the assistant."

Eh!?

EEEEHH?!

……What the heck? This is a serious matter.

A sixteen year-old using an adult for his assistant? What in the world is this guy? I stare at Shibuya with an ‘are you serious’ expression. He looks at me with all his pale glory.

"My assistant being unable to move is troubling. Don't you think you have a responsibility to take on, Taniyama-san?"

"Hey, don't joke around! Just to make things clear, I'm a victim too. Not only was I startled to death, but I was late for school."

All the world's cold is gathered inside his eyes.

"He was hurt. And how are you?"

"...That is... I'm pretty lively."

"Moreover, the camera was broken."

Ah, that video camera. Now that I think about it, it fell really badly. And it's a fragile precision instrument...

"Lin... I mean, my assistant, tried to prevent you from touching it, which lead to our current situation."

"That is……really……"

A really bad situation. That was inevitable. It wasn't my fault. Even if I say so, it doesn't feel like he'll understand.

"I would have liked for you to pay compensation for the camera, but……"

Compensation!? Are you joking!

"It isn't like I broke it intentionally!"

"Didn't they teach you not to touch other people's stuff without permission?"

……But…… I felt like…

"Why in the world is there a video camera in such a place?..."

"And, how much is the compensation……?"

What Shibuya estimated was an unbelievable sum of money. Such a great cost that only exists in dreams.

"Cut it out with the jokes! Why is that video camera so expensive?! This can't possibly be true!"

"That video camera was custom-made, produced in Germany. Would you like to see the certificate?"

Foreign order. Custom-made, at that. My eyes went black. What am I going to do?

Shibuya said:

"If you don't like this..."

……What? I can apologize for not being able to pay!

"Would you mind taking the place of my assistant?"

"By this…… You mean I'll be working as your assistant?"

"Exactly."

"I'll do it."

I'll do it, be it an assistant's job or a maid's job. Shibuya nods his head in agreement.

At the same time I asked him a sudden question.

"By the way, what kind of work are you doing, Shibuya-san?"

Second-year, high school student. 17 year-old student, has an assistant, using an incredibly expensive camera. What the hell is he doing?

"Ghost Hunter."

"Haa!?"

"Or in other words, ghost extermination. We've come here to investigate the old school building by the request of the principle. We are called 'Shibuya Psychic Research'."

"Pusai..kkiku... risaachi?"

"Haven't you taken any English lessons?"

I have. Well, excuse me. For being bad at English.

"A psychic phenomenon investigation service. And I am the head of it."

Wha……Whaat. Head, this fellow, with the social standing of a sixteen year-old!

Not only that, but what...? Investigation of the old school building? Psychic phenomenon investigation service!? This is a joke, right!?

Chapter 2 - Storm Approaching

1

"If you're interested in listening, I can briefly explain the circumstances?"

Shibuya-san says as he sits on the bench near the shrubs of the old school building.

"If I don't listen, I won't be able to do my job."

My voice was sullen. What a thing to be caught up in.

"The principal heard that the old school building is haunted, so a week ago he asked me to come investigate. Apparently, he wants to rebuild the gymnasium. For that he wants the old school building demolished."

Ah, come to think of it, that was written in the pamphlet I got at the time of my admission into the school. Soon, a big gymnasium will be built.

"However, it seems that the many times in the past that they had tried to demolish the old school building, they had to stop the demolition because of the accidents that happened."

"Ah, and they wanted an investigation so they asked you?"

"That's how it is."

"I see, and so you transferred schools for that?"

You went through a lot of trouble. But Shibuya-san is staring at me with contempt.

"Who said I was transferring for the investigation?"

"But…yesterday, you said you were a transfer student."

"When I said ‘something like that’ and intended to be ambiguous?"

……Certainly……

"That is what I said."

"Liar." I said in a small voice.

Shibuya-san gave me a frosty look.

"You were going to tell ghost stories. That’s why."

"I see. When we were telling ghost stories you might have brought up the old school building story, right? Then if you did that, it would be collecting information."

"Oh, so you have more wisdom than a monkey?"

Shibuya-san said, impressed. You jerk. Don’t compare a person with their ancestors and ancestry.

"I was collecting the rumors between the students. Yesterday when you were telling ghost stories, did a story about the old school building come up?"

"Yeah, but Michiru told it."

"What’s the story? Can you remember it?"

'Did you forget it?' his tone seems to say.

"I still remember it. I’m not so out of it that I can forget what happened yesterday!"

Hmph. Rude jerk.

"Weeellll……"

"Wait."

Shibuya-san inserted a hand into the inside pocket of his black jacket. He pulled out a small tape recorder.

“Begin"

He said as he pushed the record button.

Hmm. Well isn’t that interesting. Despite what I was really thinking, I began talking about what Michiru had told me concerning the old school building.

2

After I finished the story, Shibuya stood up and asked:

"Now then, can you take a walk with me?"

"To the old school building?"

"Where else?"

He does have a point there.

"How much of Michiru's story do you think is true?"

If it's all true, then I don't want to go to that old school building again.

Shibuya sat down again and pulled out a file.

"Many people died in the old school building."

"Really?"

I asked.

He turned to a page completely filled with writing.

I stared at it intently, but it was just like a medical record written by a doctor. It was all in English, and I couldn't understand a word of it.

"During the three years that the old building was being used... That is, eighteen years ago, one or two people died every year."

I see.

"After the new building was built, they made plans to demolish the old one. The roof fell during the demolition of the west wing. They said it was an operating accident."

"Is that true...?"

"Half of it is."

"Only half?"

"The story you heard was that construction workers died, but that's not the truth. Five people were injured, but no one died."

"Really?" So then what?

"The demolition was completed as planned; they stopped after tearing down a third of the building."

"Oh? They didn't stop because of the stories?"

"Regrettably, no. At that time, a child died in the old school building. This most recent event occurred about six years ago."

"The child is..."

"The corpse of a seven-year old girl who lived nearby was found in the old school building. The police caught the murderer a month later. He originally wanted to kidnap her. Furthermore, a teacher really did commit suicide there, but he left a suicide note. Apparently he suffered from neurosis."

"Wow, you're amazing. That was really good research"

I praised him sincerely.

"Of course. Don't underestimate my research ability."

...So it's like this. What a rude guy.

"In order to build a gymnasium in its place, the demolition of the old building began again last year."

"What about the truck that ran out of control?"

"Look at this."

Shibuya took out a copy of an old newspaper clipping from his files.

"Nine Students Struck by Construction Truck During Demolition" read the heading.

"The driver lost control of the rubble-filled truck near the school grounds, causing it to skid though the volleyball court, leaving seven injured and two dead."

Below the news report were photos of the two deceased students. Poor kids... I couldn't help but feel sorry for them. Shibuya continued indifferently,

"There's a plausible reason for it: The driver was drunk."

"...Really."

"At that time the construction had to be stopped. Another reason was because of the rumors that were floating around."

I felt a chill run down my back.

"I investigated many claims, but they all turned out to be rumors. Despite being unfortunate ones, there is a clear reason behind each and every one of them. I don't think the old building is haunted at all."

After saying that, Shibuya stood up. I don't want to go. Investigating the old school building? With me as an assistant? Shibuya turned around and looked at me, as if he were urging me on. So I followed him.

3

Shibuya lead the way, walking swiftly along the groves of trees in the front of the old school building before heading around the back. A silver van was parked behind the school building in an inconspicuous area. Shibuya opened the trunk. I couldn't see the backseats at all because a bunch of strange equipment blocked my view.

"Move the equipment out."

Shibuya ordered.

"Move... All of this?"

You must be kidding.

Shibuya coldly replied:

"Move all the necessary equipment out."

God...

A shelf was fixed on the inside of the van. On top of the shelf sat a stereo system, several small televisions, and a typewriter machine, all squished tightly together.

I didn't know anything about these machines, so I started to get a headache.

"So many machines... Do you know how to run all of them?" I asked.

"Your brain and mine are different."

...Really now, can't you even be a little modest? This jerk... He really is too confident in himself.

"Retrieve the microphone before you start moving the equipment. Come here."

Okay, okay. Well, I am your substitute assistant. It's not like I'll be cursed to

death by the old school building; I'll just be worked to death by you.

...Man, when I think of it that way, waking up in the morning sure seems scary now.

Shibuya went around to the back of the old school building. There was a small path about two meters wide near the wall behind the old school building. A row of microphones lined the path, the heads pointing in toward the old windows.

"Were you talking about these microphones?" I asked pointing to them.

"That's right. Take the microphones down. I'm putting them back."

"I got it... These microphones, what are they used for?"

...Ah, Shibuya's disdainful look.

"Wouldn't you think that microphones are generally used to gather sound?"

"I know that."

...Hmph, what a jerk.

"It's dangerous to enter a haunted building without doing research beforehand. That's why in the beginning, one should thoroughly research prior to arriving."

"Oh~."

"For instance, gathering sound from outside the windows and setting up a camera."

...So that's how it is. Amazing.

"Is a haunted building really dangerous?"

"Some are."

"You're not scared?"

"There's nothing to be scared of."

..Eh? You really don't find it scary?

"How come you want to do this kind of work when you're only sixteen years old?"

Shibuya's reply was very brief.

"Because people need it done."

...If you weren't overconfident, you wouldn't answer like that. I ignored his tone.

"Then, there must be some cases that you couldn't solve, right?"

"None."

Shibuya tersely replied:

"Because I am capable."

...This guy is really full of himself. I figured anyone would start disliking him if they heard him say that.

"Wow, incredible— You're handsome and capable," I spouted out angrily.

Shibuya turned around and looked at me with piercing eyes.

"I'm... Handsome?"

"Is that bad? You got Keiko and the others to make such a big fuss over you."

"Right."

Shibuya replied calmly,

"They have good taste."

You jerk!

What is this? So people who think you're hot have good taste, and people who think you're not have bad taste?

You little... Narcissist!

Ah, I'll just call you Naru-chan from now on.

4

After I put the microphones back, I was ordered once again, to set up the equipment.

"Do I have to go inside the building...?"

"Of course you do."

"I want to stay out here and observe the machines."

Naru-chan gave me a cold look. I'm just saying. Not acknowledging my request, Naru-chan handed me some steel pipes "Don't worry; I won't let you go alone. I'll go with you."

"Got it."

I unwillingly walked toward the old school building. The building was old and worn, and the entrance hall was pitch black. I reached my hand out to open the door. Inside the building, a little orange tint of light could be seen from the afterglow of the sunset. The fallen shoe cabinet lay in the same place since the accident from this morning. Black water droplets dotted the floor. Those must be the assistant's bloodstains.

"Wait... Wait for me."

"Hurry up."

Naru-chan carried a bunch of pipes inside, and I followed him in. The smell of dust permeated the air, and the floors creaked with every step. Deep in the entrance hall was a curved staircase. To the left and right of the staircase were hallways. There were two classrooms on the left, and three on the right. The classrooms' nameplates hung down from the wall, unreadable and covered with dust.

"Use this room."

Naru-chan said, glancing at a classroom near the entrance hall. It was the former lab room; big lab tables lined up in rows and columns. Naru-chan went in.

A typical school would normally house many students. Even if some found it annoying, it was still a place were everyone could be together. Consequently, classrooms usually weren't considered scary… Then again, they usually weren't left to weather and rot to this degree.

Plus, there are creepy rumors about this place: The truck that ran out of control, the dead child, and the beckoning hand of a white silhouette by the window.

I carefully made my way into the room although I was really scared. I let out a nervous sigh after noticing the classroom was brighter than the entrance hall. The floor was covered with dust, and the walls were worn. Naru-chan placed the steel pipes onto the table.

"Start building the shelves."

"Shi... Shibuya-san, what about you?"

"I have to bring in the rest of the equipment."

"Are you going out?"

"Of course, the equipment is outside."

Ah—

"You're just gonna leave me here alone, to build the shelf?"

Please don't.

"Are you saying you'd rather move the equipment? Some of it weighs about 40 kg."

"I'll just build the shelf," I answered resignedly.

Naru-chan nodded and walked out of the classroom. Luckily the classroom was still bright. Plus, there were no sounds except for the creaking of the floor when I moved.

I looked around. It was still bright, so there should be no problem.

Right when I was feeling nervous, a blunt, grating sound filled the room. I was

so scared I jumped. Lifting my head, I realized it was just the ceiling. I let out a sigh of relief and listened carefully.

It's okay.. It's okay...

While comforting myself, I looked at my surroundings. Naru-chan had stealthily entered the room. His sharp voice dazed me a little.

"You'd better work faster than that."

Annoying... I hate this guy.

*

While I was building the shelf, Naru-chan continuously brought in more equipment.

Not long afterward, the classroom was completely filled with equipment.

After I finished setting up the shelves, I moved the rest of the equipment onto the tables.

I stood by Naru-chan, handing him this and that.

"Hey, what's this?"

I asked, pointing at the tall machine beside Naru-chan.

"You can't tell it's a tape recorder?"

"I can't tell."

"This is a tape recorder. However, this one is special; it can record up to twenty four hours. I rely on this and the microphones to collect sound."

"...Why?"

Right after I said that, Naru-chan shot a frosty glare at me.

"I don't like speaking with amateurs."

This jerk—

"You knew very well from the beginning that I was an amateur. If you have a problem with that, I'm leaving."

I spouted out without thinking.

Naru-chan looked at me, a hint of hurt behind his eyes.

"It's to confirm whether or not there are ghostly sounds."

"Ah, so that's what it's for."

"I set up the microphones and spent the better part of today recording sound from the first floor windows."

"With those microphones just then?"

"Right. I will set up a tape recorder in this room tonight."

"...You're not gonna stay here, right?"

"Not today."

He replied as he opened five tape recorders. The tape recorders used adhesive tape, not magnetic tape.

"If there are ghosts, I won't stay here unless I know what kind they are."

"So you're the kind who looks before he leaps."

"What?"

"You're a very cautious person."

"Of course.... Some haunted houses have abnormally strong ghosts. If you don't handle these things with care, you might never return."

"Don't scare me like that.... What's this?"

I pointed at a bulky camera-like object.

"I'm through explaining everything to you."

"Then never mind, but let's just say I make a huge mistake out of ignorance."

In order to illustrate, I lifted my foot right above the camera.

"Whoops, is this camera-like object a footstool?"

I'm going to step on it—

Naru-chan sighed. I win.

"It's an infrared camera. You use it to record in dimly lit areas. It's very sensitive and uses thermography to record temperature levels."

"Oh..."

"In addition.."

Shut up.

"Thermography indicates temperature. When a ghost appears, the temperature drops."

"Got it. Got it."

"Do you really understand? Then stop asking stupid questions and get to work!"

5

After Naru-chan placed the equipment onto the table, he connected the wires to an electrical circuit. Meanwhile, I was placing thermometers in different rooms.

Though it was a frightful task, I had to be courageous and go against Naru-chan. I didn't want to go because it was scary, but I summoned up my courage so Naru wouldn't mock me again. I had no choice but to set up the thermometers.

Immediately afterward, I was given orders to record the temperatures in each room. None of these tasks could've been done without light. I exhibited exceptional bravery and fought tough battles— all this happened while I sat and recorded temperatures.

Naru-chan looked at my results.

"Nothing out of the ordinary... None of the rooms are exceptionally cold. Well, the temperature of the room on the first floor is a little low, but not significantly so."

Now the lab room looked like a science research institute. Mountains of televisions and equipment were piled up on the shelf and table.

I asked Naru-chan:

"Hey, you said that places with ghosts have lower temperatures. So does that mean this place doesn't have any ghosts?"

"I can't say yet; most ghosts are very shy."

"Huh?"

"Paranormal phenomenon often occur in uninhabited areas. So when people move into such areas, ghosts usually hide themselves."

"Oh—"

"...In conclusion, we must wait for the ghost to show up. For now, I want you to place four infrared cameras on the first and second floor, and one in the entrance."

What... I still have to work...

*

I helped Naru-chan set up a huge video camera in the lab. I set up the tripods on the west and east side of the first and second floor. Finally, I'm done.

"That must've been tiring. You can go home now."

"Really?"

"There's nothing else you can help out with for now. I'm going to leave before dark too."

Oh— You really are a cautious one.

"What about the equipment? Are you just gonna leave it here?"

"It's okay. I set up the camera to record automatically."

Oh—

"I keep thinking, you really don't act like a psychic."

"Of course."

"But isn't a ghost exterminator.."

"It's ghost hunter. Don't throw me in with psychics."

Ah— Is that so.

What does that mean? Isn't that just a type of psychic?

I decided not to push the matter. Besides, arguing with Naru was really tiring.

"I'm going then"

I called out, waving goodbye.

Ah— My hands and waist are all sore— Naru-chan's voice shot through the air:

"Meet me by the van after school tomorrow."

Dammit. This guy is gonna mistreat me again tomorrow.

Chapter 3 - Storm Warning

1

The weather on the second day was really unnerving.

Today's Friday, and the weekend's almost here~ Plus, the weather's really nice! If I just act like my usual self then everything will be alright.

But in reality, I've got a lot of things on my mind to worry about. And it's all that guy's fault. All that narcissist's fault.

A beautiful day like this rarely ever comes by. And when it finally does, I have to spend it doing some ghost hunting stuff.

Ah— I'm really unlucky...

The white sakura flowers blinded my eyes.

"Mai— "

The moment I stepped into the building, Keiko rushed up to me.

"...What is it?" I asked. "You're a bit too energetic to just greet me."

"Good morning. Hey, what did Shibuya-san say to you?

"Ha ha. So that's why you're ambushing me over here?"

"Right. Hey, exactly what did you guys talk about?"

Arghh... What...do...I do? Should I tell her? No, it would just be a waste of time. I burst out laughing. Keiko had a startled look on her face.

"Can it be—"

"It's a secret (♥)."

Hee hee hee. Everything in my heart just flew out. So this is my punishment. First of all, calm down.

But that didn't happen. Hearing the jealousy in Keiko's voice, Michiru hollered out, pressuring me to defeat.

I surrendered.

"...Whaaaat..."

Keiko let out a deep breath.

Michiru finally spoke out.

"Then, Shibuya-san... Isn't a transfer student?"

"Nope. He's just a liar."

"So that's how it is..." Keiko mumbled listlessly.

Michiru waved her hand in dismissal.

"Don't be so disheartened. Since he's not a student at our school, that means..."

Keiko finished off.

"..No love rivals!"

"Right!"

It turned out like this again. Why are you guys so happy... Are you idiots? Just because the rival doesn't go to our school doesn't mean that she doesn't go to another one. If he was a student at our school, then you guys can just divide him up or even snatch him from his girlfriend. But how are you gonna deal with a love rival whom you've never met before?

"Taniyama-san."

Suddenly someone called my name. It's that rude Kuroda girl from yesterday.

"Good morning," I answered, "Is something up?"

"That person... Is he a psychic?"

"No, he isn't."

"But didn't you just say he came here to investigate the old school building?"

...Oh— So you were eavesdropping.

Now that I think about it, I really need to change the subject.

"He's not a psychic; he's a ghost hunter."

"Ghost hunter?"

When Kuroda-san raised her eyebrows, Keiko and Michiru pulled me off to the side and asked: "Hey, what does that mean?"

"I'm not really sure, but I think it means a psychic."

"How is it different from a psychic?"

"That's why I said I wasn't sure. He brought in lots of expensive equipment, like video cameras and whatnot. That's why he just doesn't seem like a psychic."

"Oh—," Kuroda-san interjected, considering her idea, "Taniyama-san, can you introduce me to that guy?"

"Wha?"

What...do...I...do?

"I have psychic powers, so I might be able to help him with his work."

Michiru quietly whispered her resentment.

I replied:

"But... Kuroda-san, didn't you already meet him? A formal introduction isn't necessary. You can see him after school at the old school building."

"I know that, but..."

"But it's best if you don't get involved with that guy at all."

"Oh, but why?"

Kuroda-san asked, a hint of sarcasm in her tone.

"He said he dislikes talking to amateurs."

"I'm not an amateur like you."

"Ah— Still, Naru-chan is a professional. He even has an office."

"Mai"

Michiru interjected, pinching my neck.

"Calling him Naru-chan already... How affectionate of you."

"Narcisstic Naru-chan. You guys, stop fantasizing about him. He has a rotten personality."

"But he's still *that* handsome?"

"I'm just saying, If a girl is pretty, she'll definitely have a terrible personality, which is something no guy wants. If someone is pretty, that person, female or male, will definitely have a bad personality."

"Really.."

"He's such an intimidating narcissist. From now on, I'll just call that narcissist 'Naru-chan'."

I can tell from Keiko's reaction that she'd just get hurt if she got close to him. I was trying to tell Kuroda-san this, but when I turned around, I was left facing an empty space. Kuroda-san was already sitting down, with a textbook wide open on her desk.

I was speechless.

"That's just the kind of person she is."

Michiru quietly whispered to me.

"Didn't Kuroda-san go to the same middle school as you?"

I'm pretty sure Michiru is from that same middle school.

"Right. She was quite famous in middle school, always going on about her psychic powers, her warnings ‘oh~this is dangerous’, her sensitivity to ghosts, and always wanting us to do this and that."

"Oh..."

"Man, she just likes to be the center of attention. No doubt she likes all the flattery she gets."

"...Oh."

"How should I say this... Could she have fallen in love with Shibuya-san at first sight?"

"What!?" Keiko exclaimed indignantly.

Kuroda-san shot her a hateful look, to which Keiko immediately shut up. I really don't understand Kuroda-san. In the end, it's probably best not to associate with her.

2

When school ended, my friends commented on how ‘sly’ I was before I headed out towards the old school building.

After I went to the back of the old school building, I noticed the silver van was in the same parking space as yesterday. What's Naru-chan doing, sitting in the back of the car?

"Hello" I greeted him.

Hearing my voice, he lifted his head, shifting his attention from the equipment to me.

"What're you doing?" I asked.

"Looking over yesterday's recording."

Oh— I didn't really get it, but it sure did seem impressive.

"Then, did you find anything?"

Naru-chan glanced at the shelf overflowing with televisions.

"Nothing unusual."

"Nothing unusual? Then the old school building doesn't have ghosts after all?"

"Are there no ghosts? Or are they just hiding themselves? Regardless of the answer, the old school building shouldn't be that dangerous."

...When he's talking about it that way...

"Uh... Is the equipment working?"

A voice came from behind me. Hastily turning around, I saw a woman wearing gaudy clothes and a man with a dumb look on his face.

"These are expensive toys for a kid."

The woman let out a scornful laugh.

Naru-chan stared at them.

"Who are you guys?"

Kid's toys? Severe consequences will follow if you damage his pride like that. The woman looked at Naru-chan. Sure, the woman was beautiful, but she was lacking in charm. She was one scary big sister.

"I'm Matsuzaki Ayako. Nice to meet you."

Her red lips spread into a big smile.

Naru-chan coldly replied:

"I have no interest in your name."

Ayako-san almost lost it, but then she glared intently at Naru-chan.

"How arrogant, but you're definitely a handsome young man."

"Thank you."

...Hey, hey.

Ayako-san crossed her arms.

"Forget it. Even if you become more handsome, it won't be of any help. You can't exorcise ghosts with your face anyway."

Naru-chan's gaze lifted up.

"Are we in the same industry?"

"Pretty much... I'm a miko."

A miko? You've gotta be kidding, right?

But then, Naru-chan retorted.

"I was under the impression that miko were young, pure maidens."

Hearing that, I couldn't help but make a funny face. The man beside them also let out a burst of laughter.

"Oh, you can't tell?"

Ayako-san was furious as she sent deathly glares to Naru-chan. She chose the wrong opponent.

Naru-chan continued

"If you want to say you're young, I think you are really too old."

He smirked.

She deserved it. Well said, Naru-chan. The man at the side finally started guffawing.

Miko-san's lips distorted. What now? Being called "Oba-san" by a sixteen year old boy. Is there no way to retaliate?

The guffawing man proudly added.

"She also puts on heavy makeup."

This is considered mockery, but Naru-chan is still better when it comes to insults.

Moreover, are those two partners? Miko-san glared angrily at that man.

"Well, I'm just naturally beautiful. That's why it looks like I'm wearing lots of makeup."

Her voice was confident, but I'm scared that her face is already all stiff.

"To sum it up..."

Miko-san forced on a stiff smile.

"Your little show is over, kid. Just leave the rest to me."

And with her jeering voice, she laughed at Naru-chan.

"The school principal said that you're unreliable. No matter how you look at it, a sixteen year old just isn't skilled enough."

Hmph. So the principal said that Naru-chan is unreliable? Did he get more ghost hunters to come?

Naru-chan smiled slightly.

"Then please teach me, senior."

Ayako-san's scowl widened.

Naru-chan disdainfully glanced at her profile before shifting his line of sight

onto the other man.

"...Who are you? You don't seem to be Matsuzaki-san's assistant."

The man seemed older than Miko-san. He pretended to look up at the sky.

"How can I be a woman's assistant.. I'm a monk from Kouya Mountain. My name is Takigawa Houshou."

A monk from Kouya Mountain?

Wow, cool.

Naru-chan continued to look at the television screens, then said in a bored tone.

"Kouya Mountain allows long hair now?"

The man was startled after hearing that. That's right, monks don't look like this man except in manga. In fact, they're usually bald. Not only did this man keep his hair, but he also keeps it hung in a mess on his shoulder and in a messy bundle on his back.

Miko-san scoffed.

"Law-breaking monk."

"...But I really did stay at Kouya Mountain. Even though I'm not there right now..."

The monk mumbled, his voice carrying a hint of shame. I couldn't help but laugh at his pitiful appearance. Our eyes met.

"And who's the giggling girl with the big mouth?"

...I don't have... A big mouth.

"I'm just a kind-hearted student. I was called on to help him move things..."

"Oh, right, and what about you, little boy?"

Without averting his gaze, he looked at the television set. His body language seemed to say: ‘I have no interest in you guys’.

"You guys should go to the principal to find out. Seems like you at least know my age."

Naru-chan replied.

"Man, we did ask already. He said you're from a paranormal investigation office on the prestigious Shibuya Street."

"I have nothing else to add to that."

Bou-san laughed coldly.

"...The principal also mentioned that he thought he could trust this office because of its prestigious location. He never thought that the head of the investigation would be a little kid. Boy, does he feel duped."

"Really, now."

Naru-chan said in his cold tone.

Leaning on the car, Miko-san added.

"The principal... Is quite a worrywart..."

"That's right."

Bou-san agreed.

"An evil spirit or whatnot is something I can easily exorcise… So, the kid can just leave it up to me."

Miko-san said, laughing at Naru-chan.

"If you could help, then that would be fine."

Naru-chan said indifferently.

Even Bou-san decided to join in on the sarcastic remarks.

"Man, how regrettable, the kid can't help at all. That principal is also overdoing it. He called in all these people just for a little old school building."

"Right. A ghost hunter, me, and you..."

A small smile spread on Miko-san's face.

"One would obviously be enough."

"Right, he should've just called on me."

Bou-san laughed too.

"What's all this about anyway? Oh right, little boy, what's your name?"

"Shibuya Kazuya."

"Shibuya Kazuya? ...Never heard of it."

Bou-san commented.

"But, I never heard of your name either. Must be third-class."

Miko-san added.

"That's because you don't keep up with your studies. And actually, I've never heard of Matsuzaki either."

Bou-san retorted.

...Hmph, this argument is going nowhere...

What's wrong with these people... What does it matter? Naru-chan is the same; do all psychics have rotten personalities?

While Miko-san and Bou-san's argument ensued, Naru-chan continued to fiddle with the equipment. What a pain... Taking a glimpse at the playground, I noticed a girl wearing a uniform walking this way.

Oh, it's Kuroda-san.

Ah— Sure enough, she did come.

The moment Kuroda-san saw me, she waved.

"Taniyama-san."

Man— I'm not good at dealing with her.

Kuroda-san glanced at the car, seeing Miko-san and Bou-san deep in argument.

"Who are those two people?"

"They came here to investigate the old school building. They said they're a priestess and a monk."

"Really..."

When those two noticed the raven-haired girl, Kuroda-san bowed in assent.

"Are you guys here to exorcise the ghosts in the old school building?"

Miko-san examined her for a moment.

"Yes, that's the case."

The girl's face cracked into a smile.

"Ah, thank goodness. I've always had a feeling of unease towards this ghost-nest of an old school building."

Miko-san shot Kuroda-san an intense stare.

"You... How is that possible?"

"I have strong psychic powers... So it's been very annoying for me..."

"Attention lover."

"Huh?" I pondered aloud.

"You like attention, don't you? Do you want to be noticed that much?" Miko-san pressed.

"True. She... Does not have any psychic powers," Bou-san added.

"How do you know?!" I shouted.

"I can tell by looking," Miko-san responded coolly.

"...Saying that so casually!"

"She just wants to get everyone's attention. She's been tricking everyone." Miko-san shot a scornful look at the girl before turning around.

"I really do have psychic powers," Kuroda-san insisted, "I'm going to summon a spirit into my body."

"Kuroda-san!" I cried out.

"...My psychic powers really are strong..." the girl said, her eyes hard and resolute. A deadly look hovered in her eyes. It's over now.

"Fake miko, you'll regret this."

"...I'm waiting for it then." Miko-san shot her one last glance.

All of a sudden, Kuroda-san dashed back towards the playground.

3

The whole situation was so chaotic.

For now, it's best not to get involved with Bou-san and Miko-san. Or maybe I should just not have anything to do with these bad people.

Then..

"That's right. Naru-chan, what do I have to do today?"

Naru-chan looked at me, a hint of shock behind his eyes.

"What did... You just say?"

"What's wrong?"

"You just called me 'Naru-chan'."

Ah, I'm in for it now. That was a slip of the tongue.

"Sorry, I said it wrong."

"Where did you hear that?"

"Huh? Is that your nickname?"

Naru-chan wore an indescribable expression.

"Seems like everyone thinks the same way as me then, narcisstic Naru-chan."

Hee hee hee. That was a good comeback.

"Huh?"

"Forget about it, forget about it... Is there something you want me to do?"

"That's right... Just then, when I called him that, he didn't have the reaction I expected; it didn't seem like he was gonna give me a clever retort..." I pondered to myself.

"Mai's senior..."

"Ah, you called me by my first name—"

"...Didn't you just do the same thing to me?"

"But—"

"Which classroom did Mai's senior see the shadow?"

"She's not... My senior. She's... Michiru's senior's friend"

I complained, to which I was given a stern look by Naru.

"It's the same regardless of whose senior she is. Which classroom was it in?"

"It's on the second floor in the far west wing. It's the classroom that's practically stripped of everything.

"Got it. Go install the equipment there. It would be good if paranormal activity is found there."

Naru-chan said as he rose and jumped off the van. When he started walking towards the old school building, a silhouette started coming this way.

Ah... Now what is it...

When I think about the culprit that way... The principal advanced towards us.

Typically the principal is sly like a tanuki, while the head instructor is like a fox. This is true in our case, as the principal really does look like a tanuki.

Since the principal is coming here, does that mean he has some business with us? An indistinct figure walked beside him.

"Hold on a moment, who's that person by the principal?" Miko-san whispered. "It can't be... Is it another psychic..."

The moment I saw the shadow, I started to get a bad feeling in my stomach. I'm totally leaving if another nasty guy comes. The principal was chatting amiably with the other person.

He's short. Is he a student... He seems young. Also... Oh? Blonde hair. What, it can't be a foreigner!

As the principal noticed us, he wiped off his tanuki-like smile.

"Ah, everyone is together."

A kind voice.

He quickly stepped this way.

"Here's the other guest. Let me introduce you guys."

...What, so it is another psychic...

Usually foreigners look old, but... I looked at the foreigner again. He's probably twelve or thirteen. I can't tell if this person is male or female. He's short for a foreigner. He's practically the same height as me. He must still be a kid.

The principal smiled warmly.

"This is John Brown-san. Please welcome him, everybody."

...He's not a transfer student. You sure can't make a proper introduction.

Speaking of names, John is a boy's name. So this person is a "he". Ah— He's cute.

Brown gave us a deep bow. "How y'all doin?"

……?

J...Just now, was that English? My English sucks. I can't understand at all— Miko-san, Bou-san, and even Naru-chan became dumbstruck.

"I be Brown. Glad ta meet y'all.

...Str-... Strange. It sounds like Japanese...but it's a dialect...

The principal forced a smile onto his inevitable expression.

"Um... Brown-san learned Japanese in the Kansai area..."

Monk-san bust out laughing, followed by Miko-san. You shouldn't laugh. He's a foreigner. To be able to say this much is still amazing... Haha.

Brown seemed a bit lost. His confused look, his blonde hair, his blue eyes, and the fact that he's a foreigner just made him look even more ridiculous. So-... Sorry. Ahahaha.

The principal gave us a puzzled look, then said: "W-Well then, I'll just leave it at that," before running off.

Brown turned towards the principal's figure, then said: "Thank ya."

When he said it that way, we all burst out laughing again.

Instead of laughing, Naru-chan wore a stiff expression on his face.

"Brown-san, where are you from?"

"I be comin' furm Australia."

...Wow. The way he talks is really hilarious.

Sorry, I can't stop laughing—

Brown looked at us in bewilderment.

"Is my Jabanese really strange?"

Naru-chan smiled wryly.

"It's pretty strange."

Brown took a deep breath.

"Jabanese be so dif'cult!"

"Hey, kiddo!"

Bou-san shouted aloud. Bou-san saying "kiddo" sure seems strange— "I'm begging you, please don't speak in that weird Kyoto accent."

Bou-san implored.

"Still, there ain't no other talk thaz mo' polite than this here Kansai-ben talk."

"Who?! Who taught this guy Japanese!"

Bou-san exclaimed, his breathing becoming more and more difficult.

"Listen carefully. Kansai-ben is a dialect. I suggest you not speak it anymore, got it? Otherwise it'll seem like you're speaking comic-talk."

"Ah," Brown nodded, "If I don' speak, then ever'body can jus' get 'long. Y'all are psychics?"

...It's still very strange...

Naru-chan responded:

"Well, more or less. She's Matsuzaki-san, a miko. And he's Takigawa-san, a former monk on Kouya Mountain."

"An' you?"

"I'm a ghost hunter."

"Oh, then this here equipment in da car is all yors? Impressive."

"What about you?"

"Ah, I be an exorcist."

"Exorcist?"

In an instant, Miko-san and Bou-san stopped laughing and started staring at Brown, with gazes that suggested they were looking at a powerful enemy.

"About that, I thought in Catholicism you can't be an exorcist unless you're ranked higher than a priest... You seem really young to even be a priest."

"Thas' right. You, my fella, is very knowledgable. Howeva', I'm 19 already. I jus' look like a young 'un."

Oh no, I can't hold in my laughter.

Nineteen... Then that means, he's Naru-chan's senior? This foreigner really does have a baby face...

"It's best if you don't say 'wate'."

Naru-chan advised, smiling wryly again.

"If you say boku or watashi, you shouldn't say 'ansan'; otherwise, you'd be changing the meaning to 'you.'"

Brown... No, Brown-san nodded his head.

"Okay, thanks. What be ya name?"

"Shibuya Kazuya."

"Shibuya-san, hope ya don' min' takin' me aroun' the place first."

Shibuya-san nodded slightly, then turned towards me.

"Mai, time to work."

"Okay."

When Naru-chan headed towards the old school building, I wondered why

everyone else followed.

The equipment in the lab room had recordings. The sound of the machinery echoed throughout the classroom.

"These are..." Monk-san mumbled, apparently at a loss for words, "I can't believe you brought in this much equipment."

Naru-chan ignored him.

Miko-san snorted in contempt.

"This is all useless. Little boy, your little show is finished. It's time to pack all your things up."

Naru-chan ignored Miko-san.

"Bringing all this equipment in is such a waste. That must've been exhausting for you," she taunted.

Monk-san said, "That's rude. Ah— I have high hopes in you. Since you have this much equipment, you must be very capable."

His tone was ironic, mocking.

Naru-chan turned around, a hint of coldness behind his eyes. "...What about you two? Did you come here to exorcise spirits? Or did you come here to play?"

Embarrassed, Miko-san instantly turned around.

"That's why I said I hate kids. Well, it must be an earth spirit, as it seems to be showing off a lot," she purposely ranted aloud, then left.

Monk-san followed, his arms crossed in front of his chest.

"Now what are you going to do?" Naru-chan asked, facing Brown.

Brown looked embarrassed. "...Do you want me to help you?"

"I don't care."

"Um... I, I don't really know what to do in this situation. Is it alright if I stay here an' help ya out as much as possible?"

"That's fine. Just do what you want," Naru-chan answered calmly, his eyes still glued to his computer.

After nearly ten television sets were stacked on top of each shelf, the TV screens changed. Now they were showing a view of the corridors. Digital numbers and letters flashed incessantly on the screens. A view of the first and second floor could be seen from the TV placed in the entrance hall. All the screens were immersed in blue and green speckles.

"What's this?"

Naru-chan flashed an impatient look at me. Would it kill you to answer me?

Brown-san answered instead, "It's Thermography... It indicates the temperature."

"Oh—"

Hey, he's pretty nice despite being psychic. (I'm already starting to think that all psychics have terrible personalities—) Brown-san pointed at the screen. "Orange indicates hot temperatures; on the other hand, blue indicates cold temperatures."

Ah— Colored speckles, how strange.

"Thank you, Brown-san. You're so kind," I said in a tone that will hopefully taunt Naru-chan.

Brown-san blushed. "It's nothing... That's right, I didn't ask you what your name was. Are you Shibuya-san's assistant?"

"Yeah, pretty much. I'm Taniyama Mai."

"You can jus' call me John."

...It's that.. Strange Japanese again—

Turning back, I saw Monk-san in the middle of the TV screen. While examining his surroundings, Monk-san walked into the depths of the hallway. Miko-san was in another screen.

And in the other screen...

I could see the dim classroom deep in the entrance hall. Inside, the shoe cabinet cast off a shadow. And in the middle of the shoe cabinet was a ghost.

"Naru-chan!" I screamed, pointing at the TV screen of the entrance hall.

Right in front of the shoe cabinet was a doll-like girl wearing a pink sakura kimono, trying to see what was above the shoe shelf.

She looked just like a living human, with that jet-black hair of hers. She was also about the same age as me.

The girl looked at another direction, then turned and left. She was no longer in the screen.

"Wh-... What was that, just now?"

Not acknowledging my question, Naru-chan rose and headed towards the door. His expression didn't change at all.

The door opened.

The doll-like girl stood in the middle of the darkness, "......!"

I screamed.

John softly patted my shoulder.

"It's okay, Mai-san. She's not a ghost."

Huh?

Naru-chan forced a smile on..

"The principal must really want us to finish the job quickly since he went as far as inviting you..."

Her expression didn't change.

"Do you two know each other?" I asked.

"No. I only recognize her face because she's very popular," Naru-chan replied.

"Who is she?"

Though I was obviously asking Naru-chan, the girl opened her cherry-like mouth and answered me instead.

"If you're talking about me, then I'll introduce myself. I'm Hara Masako."

"Who?"

I don't know...

Naru-chan sighed. "She's a very famous psychic medium. She's great at summoning spirits, probably the best in Japan."

"Summoning spirits?"

"Ignorant, aren't you?"

"I'm talking to you—"

This time John answered my question again. "It's like calling spirits out and letting them possess your body and speak."

"Huh? Oh, like the kinds on TV, right? Like when a psychic speaks in place of the ghost, right?"

"Yup."

Naru-chan looked at the spirit medium.

"What is your evaluation of this building, Hara-san?"

The psychic medium cocked her head.

"I'm not sure... Who are you? You don't seem to be a psychic..."

"I'm a ghost hunter, Shibuya."

...What was that, Naru-chan. Do you just go for pretty faces? You don't speak to us with *that* kind of attitude.

The psychic medium looked at Naru-chan with a surprised expression.

"Have we... Met before?"

Oh. What an old pickup phrase.

"I think this is the first time we met."

"...Really...?" she said, turning around to face the pile of equipment "...I don't think there're ghosts here. Even though the principal was in a panic over it, there's nothing here. I also don't feel the presence of any spirits."

"Really..." Naru-chan said, contemplating her words.

...Does the principal want to tear down this building that much? Is the old school building really that scary?

A ghost hunter, a priestess, a monk, an exorcist, and even a psychic medium. He makes it seem so serious by inviting so many people. Just because of the old school building rumors. But, these people... Do they really have that kind of ability?

It happened at that time.

A loud, knocking sound and a woman's scream echoed through the building. We were fightenened for a moment.

"Is that Matsuzaki-san's voice?" John asked.

Naru-chan rushed out of the room and we followed. We bumped into Bou-san right after we left the lab room.

"That sound just now..!" Bou-san exclaimed.

"I'm not sure, but it seems to be on the first floor," John replied.

Matsuzaki-san's scream echoed through the hallway from the west side of the first floor on the other side of the lab room.

"What happened?!" Naru-chan was the first to reach the door, but he couldn't open it no matter how hard he pulled.

Miko-san banged on the door from inside.

"Open the door! Hey, open the door!"

Both Naru-chan and Bou-san pulled with all their strength. The door started to bend, but it still wouldn't budge.

"Let's kick it open," Bou-san suggested as he faced the door. "Ayako! Move away!"

"What! Don't just call me by my first name like that!"

...You don't seem that worried.

Bou-san kicked the door, causing the door to emit a snapping sound. Bou-san kicked the door again, this time knocking it down.

Miko-san's face looked blue.

"What happened?" Naru-chan asked calmly.

"I don't know... After I came in, the door shut by itself. I couldn't open it."

"You didn't lock it then?"

"No!"

Right when they were about to argue again, Hara-san intercepted.

"How embarrassing."

Miko-san stared at Hara-san.

"What do you mean?"

"How can you say you're a psychic? You start hollering like crazy when the door locks on you. Don't you think that's sort of embarrassing?" Hara-san taunted, her tone cold like the wind.

Bou-san whistled softly, then turned towards the raven-haired girl. "You there... Are you Hara Masako-san?"

"Yes."

"You're prettier in person."

Hara-san looked at Bou-san as if he were something dirty, then turned around.

This person has a bad personality too—

4

"Well then, we must find out exactly what's in this old school building," Miko-san arrogantly declared.

We took a break in the lab room, drinking the canned coffee that John brought.

"Aren't you being oversensitive?" Masako commented coldly.

"Shut up little girl. I'm not the same as a fake psychic who got popular just because of her looks."

A small smile brushed through Masako's face.

"Thank you for complimenting my good looks."

Hmmm— That... Reminds me of someone.

Miko-san disregarded Masako.

"I believe it's an earth spirit."

"An earth spirit is...?" I asked.

...What?

Miko-san looked fed up with me.

"Didn't your assistant go through any training, Shibuya-kun?"

"She lacks the ability to do so in this area, nor is she worth training."

Naru-chan said, his finger toying with a nail. You jerk. You must've been itching to say that.

Miko-san assumed a teacher's position.

"An earth spirit is one that lives in a certain place."

"You mean like Jibakurei[spirits that're bound to an area]?"

"So you know difficult terms like that? But they're not the same. Jibakurei are bound to an area because of an event that occurred. Earth spirits are spirits of the land, known as Seirei."

"Oh—"

So there're actually different types of spirits.

"Weren't a lot of shrines here before? In that case, there could be many of them."

"I think it's a Jibakurei," Bou-san intercepted, "Didn't something happen at this old school building? A spirit must live here. It had to disrupt the workers' progress because it was scared of losing its home."

"What do you think, John?" Naru-chan turned around to look at the foreigner.

"I'm not sure. Aren't haunted houses usually caused by *spirits turning into *ghosts?"

Naru-chan looked at the nail in his hand, then nodded. "*Spirit...seirei,* ghost is yuurei. Are you listening, Mai?"

...Mind your own business. So you think my English is really bad, huh?

"If it's a *spirit, then that means the earth spirit has some kinda relationship to the land. An' if it lives in a building, it woulda been a* ghost that might summon evil spirits or whatnot," John explained.

I see.

"If it's 'cause of a ghost, then that means the person who died in the house is a Jibakurei,"

John continued.

"You guys don't believe it's an earth spirit?" Miko-san asked as she stood up.

"I don't think so. It's Jibakurei," Bou-san said as he rose and stood beside John.

John's sky-blue eyes mirrored his confusion. "It's early, an' we still can't agree on a conclusion."

Miko-san stood up. "To sum it up, everything will be fine as long as it's exorcised. I'll get rid of it tomorrow."

She announced, "I don't have time to waste on this insignificant case. I'll go home as soon as I'm done with the exorcism."

Miko-san laughed, then waved as she left the lab room.

Bou-san saw her off, then inquired about everyone's opinions. "What do you guys think?"

Masako replied, "It's no use. I already said there aren't any spirits here."

"But there are so many rumors about this place. How do you explain that?" I implored.

"You didn't see anything bad happen, did you? A building this old will always have one or two rumors. It's like the school's Seven Wonders."

Ah— What a confident tone. This person is more and more like that other guy.

I couldn't help but retort. "Then why did the door lock on Miko-san?"

"That was because she was a bit confused," Masako replied in a blunt, authoritative tone.

So is that how it is.. True, some people will just unconsciously open and close the door. But weren't Naru-chan and Bou-san unable to open that door even with their strength combined? Can Miko-san unconsciously close the door so that it locked by itself? Then, without thinking, I laughed.

Maybe Miko-san was so scared to death when the door closed that she couldn't help but cry out in fear. That would explain why she sounded so eager to leave after the exorcism.

The dark, crimson glow of the sunset shined through the windows, leaving a rosy shine on the glass windows.

"Naru-chan, it's getting dark."

Naru-chan lifted his head towards the window.

"Ah... We'll go home after the preparations are done," he said, rising from his chair.

"Move the equipment into the classroom on the west side of the second floor."

Okay—

Bou-san wondered aloud. "Oh yeah, boy, you're not staying here, are you?"

"Not today... But I might stay tomorrow."

Huh? Then... What about me?

While I was thinking uncomfortably, Naru-chan looked at me. "Come here after school tomorrow."

"Um... Tomorrow's Saturday—"

"It doesn't matter what day of the week it is. You must work."

Uh, uh, uh. No, noooo.

"Staying here is kinda..."

"Then do you want to compensate me for the video camera now?"

"...I'll be ready."

Hmph. You really do act like a boss.

Chapter 4 - Central Pressure 912 Millibars

1

"What did you say just now?"

Michiru persistently stared at me in the morning.

"There's a rival."

"Who?"

Keiko, stop bothering me.

"She’s called Hara Masako. Have you heard of her?"

"Hara Masako? The one who's always on TV?" Yuuri asked.

"You know her?"

"Yeah... The psychic medium on that popular show... She's about our age. She's also really pretty..."

"I guess so. She looks just like a Japanese doll."

"So that girl suddenly tried to get close to Shibuya-san?"

"No, it's more like Naru-chan started it..."

"What!"

Keiko almost pinched me again.

"But it's true, that poison-tongued Naru-chan didn't say one sarcastic remark to her. I'm positive Naru-chan just goes for pretty girls."

"Oh..." Keiko mumbled, her voice depressed, disappointed.

"Hey, didn't I say it already... Give up on Naru-chan. He's not as nice as he looks, he's a liar, and he's a poison-tongued narcissist to boot."

"But he's really handsome."

...Just because he's handsome doesn't mean he's great, right?

I'm getting tired of this conversation.

My line of sight reached Kuroda-san, who was looking this way.

She's a strange one too. Is her personality that twisted just because she has psychic powers? Kuroda-san seemed to want to say something.

I thought she was going to talk to me, but then she suddenly turned around and left the classroom.

...Umm—

Right after class, Keiko & co. kept rambling on and on. It would be troublesome if they followed me into the old school building, so I dashed off the moment they started arguing again.

The weather's nice today too.

I have to work here at night. If it rains, it'll be even scarier.

But there's a big, evil spirit loitering about. I'm not panicking. I'm not that scared. Is this good or bad? I energetically opened the door only to notice that Naru wasn't here yet. In front of the equipment was another dangerous person.

Waah... Kuroda-san.

"...What are you doing?" I asked.

"Nothing. I'm just looking around. Shibuya-san doesn't seem to be here."

Kuroda-san touched the equipment beside her.

"It's best if you don't touch anything. Naru-chan will get angry."

"Really?" Kuroda-san asked, her hand still touching the TV's edge, "hey, how were things yesterday?"

"Nothing... Much. Naru-chan said there was nothing unusual."

"What did the others think?"

"Miko-san was locked in a classroom. But no one can agree on whether or not that was because of a ghost."

"Why?" Kuroda-san asked, her eyes suddenly gazing into mine.

"...The psychic medium said there were no ghosts in this old building. But Miko-san insisted that there's an earth spirit here."

"Really... Is the psychic medium you're referring to Hara Masako?"

"Yes."

"That person's an imposter."

"Wha-?!"

An imposter...

"She's on TV because of her good looks. She doesn't have any psychic powers."

"Huh..."

Exactly what is Kuroda-san thinking?

"There's a ghost here, and a very strong one too."

Then, is Kuroda-san the only one who can feel it?

Kuroda-san gazed intensely into my eyes. "I... Was just attacked."

Eh?!

"When I was walking in the corridor, a force suddenly started pulling my hair. I wanted to run, but then it grabbed my neck..."

"That... Can't be."

"It's true," Kuroda-san insisted, a dark smile spreading onto her face, "I even heard a voice telling me, 'Your psychic power is too strong. You're in the way.'."

The air around us froze in the silence.

Kuroda-san looks like she's going to say something else.

But as for me, I had nothing to say. I don't understand this kind of stuff. I've never seen a ghost, and I've never been able to feel one's presence either. It's impossible for me to know if she's lying.

That can't be right. Masako said there are no spirits here. And Naru-chan said that places like this have other dangerous things.

Scary rumors. Abandoning the old school building after tearing half of it down.

In the midst of the silence between us, Naru-chan came back.

He looked at us. "What's the matter?"

After he heard Kuroda-san talk about her story, Naru-chan thought about if for a while. "When did that happen?"

"Just now. At first I was scared and wanted to go back out, but then I saw all this equipment, and I gave it a second thought. I just got here, and Shibuya-san must also be..."

Naru-chan placed his pale fingers onto the laptop's keyboard. "Let's look at the recording. Where did you encounter the ghost?"

"The corridor on the second floor."

Naru-chan rewinded the recording.

A view of the corridor showed up on all ten TV screens, with digital numbers lined up on the side.

The digital numbers kept changing.

These changing numbers recorded the time. When the time was "13:12:26", a soft stepping sound could be heard.

Kuroda-san showed up in front of the corridor. Stiff and prudent, she carefully looked around, then went up the stairs. After she reached the top of the stairs, her eyes darted left and right.

It happened at that time.

A white line suddenly flashed onto the screen. Two times. Three times. Then it was just static, followed by a white screen. Then the screen turned all black.

"What happened— This broke—"

Naru-chan looked at the other screens. There was nothing wrong with the other ones. Only the stairs recording was blank.

"...It didn't break," Naru-chan said as he fiddled with one of the TVs.

The TV screen didn't change.

"What does this mean," Naru-chan mumbled to himself.

"...Huh?"

"Right after the ghost shows up, the camera stops working," he said, looking at the TV screen, "what can this be.. A ghost, interference with electric waves... Or..."

He contemplated his ideas, then quickly turned to face Kuroda-san. "Kuroda-san, you said you heard a sound. What kind of sound was it?"

"It was an unclear sound, but it sounded like a little girl's voice."

"Really..."

"Hey, Naru-chan? Didn't Masako say there weren't any spirits here? So how can that be?"

"About that... I think I can believe her..."

...Is it true or not? So he's not believing Masako because of her good looks?

Kuroda-san cocked her head. "Does Hara-san really have psychic powers?"

"Normally... Female mediums have different wavelengths. Maybe your wavelength is the same as that of the ghost."

"Huh?"

"If the old school building does have a ghost, then that ghost might have the same wavelength as you."

Kuroda-san couldn't help but laugh, "Perhaps."

At this time, numerous footsteps came from the entrance hall.

Miko-san, Bou-san, John, Masako, the principal, the director, and an old teacher.

In the front was Miko-san, clothed in her priestess garments. Miko-san's exorcism started.

2

"Hey, look carefully."

Miko-san instructed, throwing a jeering glance at Naru-chan.

She vigourously commanded the teachers and John to make a white, wooden altar in the entrance hall.

Awww, poor John.

Bou-san stood on the side, watching them make the preparations.

"Do you think this will work?"

"Who knows," Naru-chan answered, a cold gaze in his eyes.

"Man, you need to be more open. Young man, what about you?"

"I've never seen a Shinto exorcism before so I'm going to watch," John answered.

Miko-san stood in front of the white altar. The three teachers obediently stood behind her.

Of course, we don't care where we're standing. Looking through the window from the lab room was fine.

Miko-san clapped her hands, waving a stick with white slips of paper attached. Is that the exorcism?

"I invite you to cautiously come down onto the earth, white light enshrining the spirit..."

Wow— What is she saying?

"Please cleanse this ground, I sincerely implore you..."

I quietly whispered to Naru-chan

"What.. Is... She saying?"

Naru-chan’s face said I was disturbing him "Quiet. You're Japanese, yet you don't know what a Norito is?"

"Norito?"

"A Shinto prayer."

Oh—This is the first time I heard that.

The ceremony proceeded as planned.

Will it work?

"I invite you to come down from the Heavens and gather around at the shrine."

Norito sure sounds monotonous...

How should I say this... At least say it so I can understand.

"I entreat you to approach this ground and protect it."

Ah... I don't understand...

I carelessly fell asleep halfway through the ceremony.

Man, Bou-san fell asleep right at the beginning, so it should be no problem if I do this too. Yeah.

3

"Now there should be nothing to worry about. Our work here is finished."

Miko-san laughed while she talked to the principal after the ceremony.

...Really now.

But the principal seemed so happy, and with that bright smile of his, he complimented Miko-san.

Masako and Bou-san shot her disdainful glances.

"How about we have dinner to celebrate?" the principal invited her.

"It's best to check over things right after the exorcism is completed," Miko-san replied.

"Of course, you are a professional after all," the principal politely admitted, "well, did anyone eat lunch yet? How about we all go out and eat lunch?"

When he said that...

...Creak.

Suddenly a loud sound came from the ceiling.

The teachers and Miko-san immediately sprang up from their chairs.

Crack.

The sound of something breaking.

And at the same time, the light bulb on the door shattered, along with the windows.

Bang.

White smoke rushed out. Right afterwards, window glass shards shot towards the principal.

"Didn't you say there was nothing to worry about?" Kuroda-san sneered at Miko-san, "how should I say this... You simply can't exorcise spirits."

Kuroda-san snickered.

Miko-san glared at her for a moment but didn't say anything. She walked towards the glass shards. Though not seriously injured, the principal was losing lots of blood from his head. No wonder she didn't have any clever retorts left.

"That was just an accident," Masako coldly pointed out.

Miko-san nodded in agreement. "Of course. My exorcism..."

"...was unsuccessful in exorcising spirits. Because there were none to start off with," Masako finished off.

A triangle.

Masako saying there are no spirits, Miko-san saying she exorcised the spirits, and Kuroda-san saying there are spirits and Miko-san didn't exorcise them.

Three people staring at each other. The guys are all contemplating as well.

Turning his head, John asked, "Could it be a coincidence?"

Bou-san replied, "What if something is here? Let's say something so strong that Miko couldn't get rid of it?"

Naru-chan lowered his head. "...If that were the case, the equipment would be responding."

Ah— I'm getting anxious too.

It would be nice if I were a psychic too. If that were the case, then I'd quickly find out what kind of spirit it is and then exorcise it.

I looked blankly at the screens.

I inadvertently noticed something strange on the second floor on the west side of the classroom.

The equipment that I placed there yesterday.

I remembered that class had many disorganized rows of old tables and chairs in front of the blackboard.

...But...

"Naru-chan," I broke off Naru-chan's conversation with Bou-san.

"What's wrong?"

I pointed at the TV screen. "There's a chair in the middle of the room. It wasn't there yesterday. There were no chairs in that area."

Naru-chan raised his beautiful eyebrows, then asked the psychics behind him, "Did anyone go to the classroom on the west side?"

They all looked at each other before answering, "No we didn't...?"

4

While everyone was watching, Naru-chan rewinded the recording. He replayed the video. The recording was when the glass windows broke.

There were no camcorders in the entrance hall because they were all in the ceremony room. So in the end, nothing was recorded in those camcorders except the sound.

But the camcorder in that room was working. And right then, in the classroom on the west side, the chair moved. Apparently no one touched the chair.

In front of the blackboard, a dusty chair suddenly started moving little by little, until it reached the middle of the room.

It moved nearly fifty cm.

"How did that happen?" I raised my head, asking Naru-chan.

"...I'm not sure."

Upon hearing Naru-chan's reply, Kuroda-san declared from behind, "Is it a poltergeist?"

"Poltergeist?" I asked.

"It means ‘noisy spirit.’ Like when an object moves or a sound is produced. — Right, Shibuya-san?"

"Right. You seem to have a clear understanding of this."

"This is common sense."

...Sorry I don't have common sense.

"I don't think this is a poltergeist," Naru-chan stated.

"Why?"

"Objects moved by poltergeists are usually warm."

"Is there a problem...?"

"According to the thermography, that chair's temperature did not rise. This kind of thing never happens."

Kuroda-san was dumbstruck.

I remember that thermography is supposed to record temperatures.

Oh— I see.

John turned towards Naru-chan. "Aren't there other conditions that would categorize this as a poltergeist? I think this is a poltergeist."

Naru-chan smiled slightly. "Tisane."

"What's that?" Miko-san asked.

Masako shot a look of contempt at her. "Are you really a psychic?"

Annoyed, Naru-chan explained, "Of course, Hara-san would know. E.Tisane, a French officer, classified poltergeists."

"Huh?" I sighed. Looking around, I noticed that Bou-san didn't seem to know about this either. Kuroda-san just looked clueless.

"There are nine categories in total. Explosions, opening and closing of doors, noises, knocking... Out of the nine conditions, three occurred here: a door closing by itself, a moving object, and a shattered window. That isn't enough to qualify this as a poltergeist haunting."

Unable to hold back my question any longer, I asked, "So the thing that attacked Kuroda-san was..?"

Suddenly Bou-san asked, "What did you say?"

...Ah— We didn't tell them about Kuroda-san's incident yet.

Since I accidentally spouted it out, Kuroda-san had no choice but to explain again. Meanwhile, Naru-chan carefully re-examined the TV that didn't record the incident.

Naru-chan glared angrily at me for a moment while Kuroda-san proudly shared her story.

5

"Masako-san, what do you think?"

Bou-san's voice sounded so loud in the silence.

"She made a mistake because she was thinking too much," Masako quietly replied.

Kuroda-san glared at her. "I'm not mistaken. Why don't you admit it. There's an evil spirit in the old school building."

Masako silently stood up.

"...Are you going to run away?"

"...Run away? Why would I run?" she carefully looked at Kuroda-san, "I'm just going to look over this place again."

"That was really not straightforward of her," Miko-san snickered, "she could've just said that the other girl was wrong."

"...There are no ghosts in the old school building," Masako calmly repeated before walking out of the classroom.

John looked at Masako's figure as she left. "It seems like she got quite a blow there."

"Of course," Naru-chan replied, "psychics can see things that normal people can't. If you mess up, then you can't be considered a psychic anymore."

Oh— Are you covering up for her?

You... Really just go for pretty faces.

"Naru just goes for pretty faces."

I... Thought for a moment there that I said that aloud.

Seems like someone else thinks the same way as me: Kuroda-san.

"Why do you say that?" Naru-chan shot a cold stare at her direction.

"Aren't you covering up for her?" she asked.

"She has been remarkably successful in her job. I'm just giving her the respect she deserves."

...Huh?

"Really now?"

Oh my God, we were thinking the exact same thing.

Does that mean, I can get on good terms with her?

Miko-san giggled, "Well, we think you should treat us with some respect too."

"I would if Matsuzaki-san's ability were high enough," Naru-chan replied in a cold tone.

...You bastard, you really do treat us differently.

Bou-san laughed, "Well— That can't be helped. She can't exorcise the ghost, and she screamed for help when she was locked up."

"When did I scream for help?"

"Just last time, when you were locked in that classroom. Didn't you scream for help?"

"No I didn't!"

"Oh— Then, then you were howling, right? Like a dog?"

...Here it comes again.

If Miko-san were a dog, then Bou-san would be a monkey. A dog and a monkey..

Ah—so noisy.

Miko-san countered his insults.

Crack.

The sound of wood breaking.

...Miko-san, don't break this building.

Thump.

Everyone was silent.

This old school building shakes a lot. If you're not careful it might fall— A loud knocking sound came from the ceiling.

Bou-san looked at the surroundings, "A rapping sound?"

Huh? A rapping sound... Happens when a ghost is about to show up...

A chill ran down my back.

Crack... Thump...

The sounds are from the west side of the ceiling.

Crash

Along with the faint cracking sounds, a loud, splitting sound shot through the air from the west side.

Followed by a piercing scream.

The room was completely silent again.

Suddenly, John shouted, "Hara-san!"

Eh?

Jumping out of nowhere, John rushed towards Naru-chan's TV screen.

"Hara-san fell from the second floor!"

Chapter 5 - Maximum Velocity 68 Knots

1

It's evening. The ambulance left the school. The people standing in front of the old school building were bathed in the orange glow of the sunset.

Masako had fallen from the classroom on the west side of the second floor.

That classroom was old and worn. There was no wall on the west side of the classroom. There was only a wooden plank, worn down by the weather. That wooden plank cracked and broke.

Masako had fallen from there... She fell three meters before hitting the ground.

The metal pipes that were placed there during the investigation remained in the same place.

Thank goodness she fell onto soft ground and not onto the metal pipes.

"Exactly what happened?" the principal questioned Naru, "I called you here so you could exorcise the ghost. Before, your assistant was injured, and now someone else is injured. Those rumors are..."

Naru interrupted the principal. "My assistant was injured because of a brainless student of yours."

...Are you talking about me?

"Before Hara-san shifted into unconsciousness, she insisted that there are no ghosts here. She said this was an accident due to her carelessness. Don't worry."

"But..."

"I will go back and continue to investigate."

Naru bowed, then left for the old school building.

...Accident? Masako did say that's what it was.

Still...

"That's just Masako being stubborn," Miko-san asserted.

Before we knew it, the lab room became our base room.

"I think there's a ghost here," Miko-san repeated.

"Really? Then Ayako must've been unsuccessful in exorcising it," Bou-san retorted.

After hearing Bou-san, Miko-san blushed in embarrassment.

"...Okay, I admit it. My exorcism failed. This place is dangerous."

I couldn't help but ask, "Dangerous?"

Miko-san crossed her arms in frustration. "If an exorcism fails, the ghost will act like an injured bear: it'll act fierce..."

"Then, it's your fault Masako's injured!"

"No it's not!"

...But, isn't that what you're saying?!

Naru interposed. "Don't jump to conclusions. The camera recording revealed it as an accident. It's exactly what Hara-san said: she was careless."

True. Masako didn't seem to know that the wall wasn't firm. She didn't know it was only supported by a rotten wooden plank.

She accidentally leaned on the wooden plank, making it crack. The camcorder recorded the entire incident.

Still...

"Hey, Naru? Aren't places considered haunted because bad things like accidents or suicide happen there? Whether it's an accident or a suicide, don't both happen for a good reason? But in the end, people still believe those places are unlucky..."

When I said it that way, Naru crossed his arms, contemplating the matter deeply.

"True. But... This building is strange. I don't understand."

"Why?" Kuroda asked, her tone blunt and frank.

"There have been no responses to the equipment. There have been no temperature declines, no ion deviations, and no electromagnetic wave abnormalities. All of the data appear normal."

"Then, why did Miko-san get locked up? Why was I attacked? Why did the camcorder recording vanish? Why did the windows break? And how come the chair moved by itself?"

"That's why I said I don't understand."

Bou-san interrupted, "Maybe you don't know about this kind of ghost. It could be a ghost strong enough to hide its presence."

Naru pondered the idea. "So you think that..."

"It's a Jibakurei," Bou-san finished the sentence.

"I bet it's a tsukumogami," Miko-san added.

"A tsukumogami?" I asked.

"Sometimes inanimate objects will be possessed by a ghost. For instance, a table, a chair, or even a house. Those inanimate objects absorb human emotions in its environment and then become possessed."

Oh...

"This building probably absorbed the emotions of the students and teachers, especially their fear of this place."

...What the... That's scary.

Thankfully, Masako isn't seriously injured. But...

Bou-san shot Miko-san a look of disgust. "Then where did that earth spirit of yours go?"

"Of course, part of it is the earth spirit's fault."

"This building is a gathering place for spirits. The spirits absorb the negative emotions of the people and then become tsukumogami."

"Oh~."

Naru asked, "What do you think, John?"

"I'm not sure. But this place is dangerous. I'll perform an exorcism."

"Really..."

"Naru, what do you think?" Bou-san inquired.

"I'll withhold my opinion for now. I'm going to investigate this from a different angle."

"Oh.~"

"Mai."

"Yes."

"I'm going back to the van. You stay here. If anything happens, call me," Naru-chan said, pointing to a microphone. "This microphone is linked to the van."

"Okay."

How sly of you. So the narcissist is the only one leaving?

2

Naru left the lab room.

Bou-san asked Miko-san, "What's up with that guy?"

"What's wrong?"

"He brought in lots of expensive equipment, but does he really know what he's doing?"

"How would I know?"

"He's much better than you two," Kuroda retorted.

"Well, young lady, aren't you going home?"

"I want to witness your incapability before going home," she chuckled, "now what are you guys going to say? It sure would be nice if you could actually exorcise the ghost."

Bou-san and Miko-san's eyes filled with anger and hostility.

...You don't need to go around making enemies.

John stood. "My turn."

"Ah.. What a huge honor, Exorcist," Bou-san mocked.

John nodded slightly.

John doesn't look for a fight. He's a nice guy, unlike you guys.

"Do you need help with anything?" I asked John.

"No. But when I start praying, keep an eye on the equipment. There might be a response."

"Okay."

...Don't scare me like that.

The TV screen gave a view of a room on the second floor that was rumored to have a ghost.

It was also the room where Masako fell down. The sunset's afterglow shined into the classroom.

Suddenly the TV's connection was cut, leaving the screen filled with static.

...Huh?

The screen was filled with black-and-white static. Something was wrong with the video camera. Even the angle it was recording from changed.

In a panic, I quickly fumbled for the microphone that was connected to Naru's car.

"Naru."

"What's wrong?"

"The TV screen is all static."

"That's all right. Once it's dark, the videocam changes its recording mode. How's the situation?"

"John said he's going to perform his exorcism... Ah, he's here."

John changed into priest robes, which looked great on him. His stunning blonde hair gives him a mysterious air.

Walking into the classroom, he lifted a cup filled with water. He dipped his finger in the water and drew a cross on the altar with it. After he drew the sign of the cross on the altar and wall, he placed the altar, some gray candles, and a cross onto the platform. The room brightened after he lit up the candles. Then John placed his hands together, bowed his head, and prayed.

A faint sound came from the microphone.

"Heavenly God, please allow us to worship you."

John scattered the water. So that must be holy water. Then he opened his bible.

"God, your soul becomes our heaven and the earth."

The TV screen was recording this smoothly. There was nothing out of the ordinary.

"In the beginning was the word. The word was with God. The word was God..."

After constantly staring at the TV screen, Bou-san finally stood up. "I'm going out for a walk."

"I'm going too."

Miko-san also stood up.

...Where are you two going.

"Kuroda-san, you're not leaving, right?"

"If you're scared, I'll stay here with you."

"Stay here with me...?"

Ah— How embarrassing. But it can't be helped that I'm scared.

3

The sky grew darker and darker.

The light from the TV screens was the only thing that kept the room from being swallowed up in darkness. Even though there are lots of TV screens, the room was still dark and forboding.

Bou-san was in the TV screen, walking in the corridor of the first floor. Dressed in monk robes, he walked towards the room on the far left, his hand holding an object. John continued to perform his exorcism in the classroom above.

He took some white sand from a container and scattered it around the floor. Is that salt?

"The word was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made."

John suddenly stopped praying and started looking around.

...What happened?

I increased the volume of the speakers.

In the midst of John's prayer, a snapping sound could be heard.

"It's noise made from a poltergeist," Kuroda stated.

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of men," John continued.

He constantly lifted his head to look at the ceiling.

"The light shone in the darkness. But the darkness could not comprehend the light..."

The ceiling...

"Ah!" I shouted.

I looked at the classroom ceiling on the west side. Near the room with the wooden plank. It's right under the room where Masako fell from.

The wood on the ceiling was bending.

It's almost like something's trying to penetrate through the ceiling.

It's dangerous!

I suddenly pounced up from my chair.

"Taniyama-san?!" Kuroda cried out.

I rushed out of the lab room.

When I ran near the room John was in, I heard a loud cracking sound.

"John! John!"

I forcefully slid the door open, leaving a surprised John staring at me.

"Mai-san..."

"John, it's dangerous. Come out now!"

"Eh?!"

Not even a second passed after I pointed toward the crack in the ceiling that the ceiling came crashing down, rocking the floor. With the candle knocked over, the room was pitch black.

4

The flashlight flickered, then lit up.

The rubble covered up the entire classroom. Pieces of wood and stone were scattered all over the floor.

...The west side of the roof completely collapsed.

"If Mai-san didn't call me, I would've been in trouble," John said, his voice quivering slightly.

Naru picked up a piece of rubble and examined it.

He looked like he was in a trance.

"Since this place is dangerous, let's go down instead," Bou-san advised, a hint of nervousness in his voice.

Miko-san crossed her arms in a cold manner. "...I'm leaving today."

"You sure get scared easily," Kuroda laughed.

Miko-san appeared unaffected by her remark. "Your life is the most important thing. Masako would've died if she fell onto a slightly different place. John almost died too. I'm smart, so I'm retreating before that happens to me."

"Are you scared?"

"It doesn't matter. I'm calling it quits for today. I'll continue tomorrow."

...How can you do that.

"She's correct," Naru stated silently.

"Hey, hey, Naru-chan," Bou-san exclaimed in shock. "You're not scared by this too, are you?"

"Say what you want," Naru replied. "But this time, Miko-san is correct... Mai, you can go home."

"Really?"

Ah, I accidentally let out a laugh.

"Right, you should also..." Naru paused, throwing the rock he was tossing around back into the pile of rubble. Then he faced Kuroda, saying, "Kuroda-san, you should go home too."

"Hey hey, so if I'm not a girl, then..." Bou-san nagged.

Naru sent a deathly glare at Bou-san's direction. "I suggest that all of you go home now."

John sighed. "I... Guess we should go home then."

"How obedient," Bou-san said, smacking his lips, "forget it, let's just call it a day."

Ah, so you're the only one left now. Are you scared... Hmm..

We were all ushered out of the building by Bou-san.

Naru-chan waved to us from the entrance hall. "Good-bye."

"Naru, what about you? You're not going home?"

"I have to investigate more."

...You want to stay here? ...You're a courageous one.

We left the building under Naru's gaze.

Chapter 6 - Wind and Rain Subside and the Waves are High

1

The next day, I went to school right after I got up.

Naru's okay, right?

I'm kinda worried. He just stayed in the old school building by himself. Afterwards, did the ceiling fall... Or...

Man— They say ill weeds grow apace.

Once I was in the old school building, I went directly towards the lab room.

Naru's not here... It can't be that simple.

Nearly half of the equipment was carried out, and the remaining ones weren't recording anything either.

What happened?

I ran outside.

If Naru's not in the lab room, then he must be in the van.

I went around the old school building and saw the van, which was in the same parking space as yesterday.

I peered into the van. Naru was leaning on the equipment, fast asleep.

I knocked on the car window.

"Naru!"

He opened his eyes slightly, apparently still in a daze from sleeping. Then he looked at me.

...This guy... Is really handsome.

It's rare for someone half-awake to make me feel so happy.

"...Mai."

"Good morning."

"Don't 'good morning' me. What's wrong with you, coming here so early in the morning."

Hmph— I came because I was worried about you.

"It's not early at all. It's already past 11 o'clock."

"It's not afternoon..."

It's not afternoon? What kind of life are you living?

"I made coffee. Do you want some?" I offered.

"You are hardly ever this sharp."

Can't you at least say thank you?

Forget it. I'm used to it anyway.

I took out the coffee that I brought with me and poured it into a cup, then handed it to him.

"Last night, did you find anything?"

"Yes."

...Eh?

I really wasn't expecting a yes. The tone in his voice seemed to say that there was more.

"Ah, do you know what's wrong with the building?"

"Yes."

Naru's face was stoic.

Right when I was going to ask more questions, I was interrupted by the rest of

the team calling out Naru's name.

The psychics have come.

2

In the front was Bou-san. "Hey, what happened?"

"What do you mean 'what happened'?"

"The equipment in the lab room!" Miko-san shouted in a stubborn tone.

"Are you getting ready to leave?"

Naru calmly replied, "Yes."

"...Are you kidding?"

Miko-san looked surprised.

"No, that's why I started bringing back my equipment."

Silence ensued.

Then, everyone started talking again.

Naru placed a hand on his head.

"Please don't be so loud to someone who just woke up... I just went to sleep a little while ago."

Huh... He stayed up all night?

Bou-san stared at Naru. "...Then why are you putting all your equipment back?"

"I've decided that this case has been solved."

"You exorcised the ghost?" Bou-san asked.

"No."

Huh?!

Naru slowly picked up his files and handed them to Bou-san.

"What's this?"

"Last night, the old school building sank 0.2 inches."

"What did you say?"

Bou-san snatched the graphs from Naru and carefully examined them. Unfortunately for him, he didn't understand it at all and just ended up looking embarrassed.

"I don't understand."

Miko-san interjected, "What's going on?"

"Land subsidence."

"What? Are you saying that all the phenomenon were caused by land subsidence?!"

Not acknowledging the question, Naru reached into his files and took out a sheet of paper.

"A level scale graph, a geological diagram, and a water-course diagram," Naru muttered, placing each diagram beside him.

"What're those?"

"If you look at them, you will know."

We gazed intensely at the diagrams.

"Diagrams..."

"They're diagrams..."

Man— I don't understand these diagrams!

Finally, Naru's fully awake.

He stretched. "The building was built on moist land. The workers had placed fresh soil on this land in an attempt to lessen the moisture before the school was built. Based on the number of wells around the area, there is a big water vein running beneath the school."

Everyone stared at the diagrams.

Countless circles were drawn onto the diagrams.

"Now only two wells remain, both of which are dry. This is what I discovered

yesterday."

"Huh?"

"What I'm saying is, the building is weak because it was built on damp soil. Furthermore, the water vein is almost dry. Because of these factors, the building is sinking. Moreover, the building is sinking at an alarming rate. The area that is sinking the fastest is..."

Naru pulled out another diagram and pointed at blue circles that indicated areas that were falling apart. "Over here. The building is sinking rapidly on this side of the building, and as a result the rest of the building is becoming unstable and distorting. Even though the principal wants to tear down the building, there really is no need. The old school building will come down in a matter of time."

Everybody fell silent.

Bou-san disappointedly lowered his arm. "What, so you're saying the chair moved and the ceiling fell because of this?"

"Correct. The classroom on the west is three inches lower than the one on the east."

"Three inches, meaning 7.5 centimeters... That was unexpected," Miko-san mumbled in dissatisfaction.

"Then the ghost sounds... Were they also?" Miko-san asked.

Naru nodded. "Those weren't sounds made by ghosts. Those were sounds made by the building falling apart."

"...Stop playing with me. Then are you saying we were in a dangerous place like that?" Miko-san asked.

"Apparently, yes."

"Then it's really dangerous. Tell the principal to make that building off limits to everyone desu ," John said.

Bou-san couldn't stand it anymore. "John! I beg you, don't use 'desu' with the Osaka dialect!"

"Sorry..."

Don't be mean to him. It's not John's fault. It's the guy who taught him Japanese fault.

"John's right," Naru said in an icy tone. "Inform the principal that the old school building is to be off limits to everyone. It will collapse soon."

3

In the afternoon, when Naru and I finished putting the equipment back, Kuroda came.

"...What happened?" she asked, observing the scene.

I explained the situation to her.

"Since this building was built on damp soil, it's not very sturdy and is now falling apart. That's why it seems that ghosts are here."

"But... Then, what about the ghost who attacked me?" Kuroda asked, her gaze turning to Naru.

That's— Oh yeah, I almost forgot about that. That's... How can that be explained?

Naru coldly replied, "Perhaps it is a wandering spirit that follows you around."

"...How can that be," Kuroda said.

A wandering spirit. Ah... Is that so.

"Then, are you done with your work?" she pressed.

"Not yet. I will be after I finish writing my report today."

...It's all over.

That's right. Naru's a ghost hunter who came here to investigate the old school building. Keiko and them will be disappointed. We'll never see him again.

Ha ha ha. Keiko and the rest may be disappointed, but I know I'm not. I'm so happy~ I won't have to get tangled up with this guy again. So happy...

……?

"I still think there's a ghost here," Kuroda insisted.

"There is none."

"How confident. This place may have land subsidence, but a ghost could still be here."

Kuroda was stubborn, unwilling to accept Naru's words.

"There are none. My investigation has showed me that there are no ghosts here."

"You could've made a mistake."

"Kuroda-san."

There it is again. That cold look in Naru's eyes.

"Well then, you can exorcise it. I believe my work here is done, so I'm packing up."

Kuroda looked timid for a moment. She turned around to avoid Naru's piercing gaze.

I whispered, "This sucks."

"Because I'm about to leave?"

...Who said it was about you!

"You narcissist! Why would I feel sad about you leaving! Stop joking around! You're just a..."

"So you're okay with me leaving?"

"...Well it's like the end of a dream."

"Huh?"

"The old school building is in the corner of the school. No matter how you look at it, it seems like something's there, and that's how the rumors about the ghosts started. ...Doesn't that seem sort of romantic?"

"But aren't you scared of it?"

"...That's two different things. It's a scary feeling, but it's also a happy one. Do you understand this kind of feeling? But... Since everything was caused by land subsidence, it doesn't feel romantic at all. At least say you're running away from the earth spirit. It would be bearable if you say that. Soon the old school building

will fall down and be replaced by a gymnasium. All the rumors will eventually fade away too... It's kind of sad. Even though I wouldn't like it if people died here, I still like talking about ghost stories."

"...Is that so?"

"Yes, it is."

And at that time...

Crack..!

A sharp sound. The windows in front of us Cracked.

"Mai! Get away!" Naru shouted.

"Okay!"

The building's falling?!

But my legs won't move.

The windows shattered, with the glass flying out the window because the curtains prevented them from flying at us.

And at the same time, there was a knocking sound.

A knocking sound...?

...No, it can't be this feeling. This is...the sound of someone knocking on the wall...

Who's doing this?! Who's making this loud noise?!

"What's happening?" shouted Miko-san as she ran into the room.

"...Is it collapsing...?" asked Naru hesitantly.

This was the first time I heard Naru speak without confidence.

Who can be knocking on the wall so hard? The sound seemed to be coming from all directions. And with each knock, the building shook. Dust drifted down from the ceiling.

"Is someone knocking on the wall?"

Naru didn't answer Miko-san's question.

Bang!

Suddenly the door shut itself. It was scary, especially since it happened right after the glass windows had shattered.

The door opened and closed by itself.

No one touched it.

It just automatically opened and closed.

When the door closed one more time, the windows completely shattered, covering Kuroda's body.

Kuroda screamed.

Bou-san and John's voice came from somewhere inside the building.

Naru grabbed my hand, then turned to help Kuroda stand up. He opened a window and motioned to it. Then he turned to Miko-san. "Go outside!"

"Through the window?!" she cried out in panic.

"Now's not the time to fight!"

I went through the window since it was impossible to go through a constantly moving door like that.

Naru grabbed Miko-san's hand.

"Hold on, let go!" she protested.

Not listening to her pleas, Naru continued to pull Miko-san. Then he looked at me, shouting: "Hurry up and run! It's not safe!"

...The building is falling apart. And now, this big mess happened. The knocking sound on the wall, the door opening and closing... I wonder what's doing all this.

If it's not because this building is unsturdy, then it must be...

Holding Kuroda's hand, I ran away from the building.

I kept running until I was far away.

4

We quickly ran out of the building, followed by Bou-san and John. Afterwards the building became quiet.

We gazed at the old school building.

The sounds had stopped. We were finally able to think about what happened.

I felt a sharp pain in my hand. I looked down and noticed the cuts and scratches in my palm. Was this from when I climbed out the window?

How's Kuroda? The glass practically shattered into her. When I turned to look at her, I saw the gashes on her body.

"Are you okay?"

Noticing little pieces of glass in her hair, I reached my hand out and removed them.

"Don't move. Are there any glass shards in your clothes?"

Kuroda shook her head.

Miko-san wiped off some of Kuroda's blood with a handkerchief.

Bou-san looked at Naru. "...What was that?"

Naru didn't reply. He just gazed at the old school building, a dazed look in his eyes.

"Was that ground subsidence?" asked Bou-san.

"I wonder..." Naru mumbled to himself.

"What the hell?! Didn't you say that there're no strong poltergeists here!" Bou-san yelled.

Naru had nothing to say. His hand was crimson red. In order to help us escape, he received serious injuries.

"Naru... Your hand," I said.

"Huh?" He looked at his hand, finally noticing his injury.

"It's okay. It's not a big deal."

When Miko-san finished taking the glass pieces out of Kuroda's clothes, she turned toward Naru.

"Can land subsidence do that? That sound wasn't from rotting wood. That was definitely the sound of someone knocking on the wall."

Bou-san laughed, "You're exaggerating. Are you saying a giant was there? You don't know how to explain the feeling, so you just compare it to a huge hand knocking on the walls."

"It could be."

Ah, when it comes to insulting Naru, they're best friends.

Miko-san patted the dust off of her clothes. "How stupid of me. I almost believed this child."

"...Give him a break. It can't be helped. After all, he's still young."

Naru was silent. He just looked at the old school building. His face was void of feeling, but for some reason he still seemed strong.

"I wonder... Get back to work."

"Yeah, we have to at least finish the job here."

What... An annoying guy.

Even though you're not an outgoing guy, you do settle down in these kind of situations.

Those two laughed around, then left. John silently helped Kuroda treat her wounds.

"Naru?" I asked.

"Hm?"

He said in an empty tone. He didn't even look at me.

"If you don't treat your hand..."

The glass must've pierced a big blood vein. Blood flowed down his left hand and dripped off his fingertips, leaving a pool of black blood on the ground.

"It's all right. It'll clot soon."

"But..." I couldn't say it.

Naru didn't even turn around to look at me. His tone was cold, and his face expressionless.

"What I'm saying is..."

"Help bandage Kuroda's wounds."

"Okay."

"As of now, I need to calm down. I hate myself so much I can't stand it."

...Okay.

You... Are filled with pride.

5

After we helped Kuroda bandage her wounds, we sent her home. I don't know when Naru left after that.

"Where did Naru go?" I asked as I stood in the entrance hall of the old school building.

Bou-san and Miko-san looked through every classroom, searching for him.

"Yeah... Where did he go anyway?"

Miko-san laughed in contempt. "How cute. He must've left from embarrassment."

Bou-san laughed too. "True, it sure is nice to be a kid."

...These two—

"It must be a tsukumogami. This time I'll exorcise it successfully," said the tall woman.

Bou-san turned to face her, then retorted, "Oh, didn't you already give up?"

"It was just one mistake."

"You don't have the ability to. It's my turn. Now you can see the difference between me and a little girl like you."

...That's so arrogant. Unbelievable. You didn't do anything today, and when everyone's trying their best, you just complain. Now what?— The difference between you and a ‘little girl’?

Bou-san really did look like he was going to do an exorcism. Dressed in black robes, he had placed the altars up in the room.

"You're not going to watch?" he asked Miko-san.

I listened to Miko-san's reply as I prepared to move the rest of the equipment.

John was helping me. "Is this really okay? Moving all the equipment back?"

"It's all right. If we need to use it again, we'll just move them back. Plus, this place might collapse anytime soon."

Miko-san snickered. "Do you still believe that kid's theory about land subsidence?"

I couldn't help but glare back at her. "Do you have any evidence that he's wrong? If you're going to laugh, at least get evidence that evil spirits are here first."

For a moment she looked insulted, but she didn't say anything. "You really like to stand up for him, huh."

"That's because right now, he's my boss."

...Even though I'm just a replacement, I still am Naru's assistant.

I lifted a video camera and walked out the door.

Seems like Bou-san's starting the exorcism. He was sitting down, his back turned towards me. "On sunba nisunba un bazara un hatta."

Hmph. Can this weird chant really get rid of the ghosts here?

"Zyaku un ban koku."

...Where did Naru go?

When I finished moving all the equipment, I waited for him in the van. Naru still didn't come back.

The sky darkened.

By then Miko-san redid her exorcism. It seems like they're gonna leave now.

It was completely dark.

What now? Do I go home? Or should I wait for Naru?

What do I do?

Chapter 7 - Flood Warning

1

After I went home, I came back and set up the microphones and tape recorders with John.

At first I wanted to set up the camcorders, but I didn't know how to, which sucked.

We placed the 24-hour tape recorders in the west side of the building, the place where Kuroda was attacked, and the lab room.

Bou-san and Miko-san were patrolling the building.

...Is Naru coming back tonight?

I sat on the stairs, pondering this until I noticed a figure walking down the entrance hall.

"Naru?"

The figure came closer. It was a girl. It was Kuroda.

"Kuroda-san..." I called out.

She looked around, "How's the situation?"

"After you left, both Bou-san and Miko-san did an exorcism. Now they're just walking around the place."

"...Oh. What about Naru?"

"He's not here. He went somewhere else."

"...Really."

"Hey," I said, standing up. "You said there're ghosts here. What kind are they?"

She cocked her head. "I saw many ghosts of injured people here."

"...Is that it? Do you have any evidence of that?"

As long as there's evidence...

I started thinking about it.

There're so many scary rumors about the old school building. But in the end, a rumor is a rumor. I don't have psychic powers so I can't tell if someone who died in this building is still lingering here as a ghost.

"What's wrong?" Kuroda asked as she looked at me.

"I was thinking that there really are no ghosts here."

"I said I saw them."

"...True..."

Hmph. I don't understand this stuff.

I contemplated the matter again. Miko-san was coming down the stairs.

"Well now," Miko-san said, wrinkling her brow as she noticed Kuroda. "This is not the time to be playing games."

"...Was the exorcism successful?" asked Kuroda.

"Is that any of your business?" the older woman retorted coldly.

"Naru said that... My wavelength is the same as the ghost's."

"Really? Is Naru's word reliable?"

...So rude.

Miko-san looked at us. "The exorcism is over. I stayed here because I'm careful. You kids should just go home and sleep."

"That's what you said last time, and you weren't successful then," I retorted.

Miko-san seemed to flare up. "This time it was successful. Now there's no ghostly phenomena."

"Oh?"

...You sure like to babble, idiot.

"The exorcism was unsuccessful," Kuroda persisted.

"Eh? Why do you say that?" Miko-san's eyes were stern and hard.

"I can feel it. There's still a lot of ghosts..."

Miko-san snickered. "Would you like to compare your powers to mine? Even if you have a little psychic power, don't think so much of yourself. Unlike you, I'm a professional."

"You may be a professional, but you sure don't have any amazing powers yourself, right?" Kuroda spit back.

The two glared at each other. At this time John and Bou-san came down from the stairs. When they saw the two girls arguing, they shot each other an understanding glance.

2

After hearing Kuroda say the exorcism was unsuccessful, Bou-san snickered.

"Forget about Ayako. I exorcised the ghost so now there should be no problem. There're no ghosts here anymore."

"What's up with you saying 'forget about Ayako'?" said Miko-san.

"It's the truth."

"Don't take the credit from me."

"There's no need to."

...Here they go again. Do you two only get along when you're insulting Naru?

Those two just can't help but bicker. Turning around, I noticed John was looking up at the ceiling.

So I raised my head to look at the ceiling too.

Hmm? What's that? A stepping sound?

Footsteps from the second floor...

Noticing me and John, Miko-san and Bou-san looked up at the ceiling as well.

Stomp stomp stomp...

Someone's running up and down.

Bou-san stood up. "What kind of sound is it...?"

"Sounds like someone running..." Miko-san replied, looking at us.

Everyone's here. Naru wasn't here in the beginning. But, who's making that sound...?

As the footsteps came closer and closer, we all stood up.

There was a platform in the middle of the stairs, and from there the stairs

spiraled down. We were on the first floor so all we saw when we looked up were the railings.

Step. Step. Step. The footsteps were on the stairs now. They were coming down, towards us. Step. Step. Step. Whoever was making the sounds must be on the platform now, so I looked up and saw...

Everyone else looked up too, but then the footsteps stopped.

The room was filled with silence.

In a rush Bou-san ran up the stairs, looked at the platform, then came down.

We asked, "Was anyone there?"

"...No."

"Well, what about those footsteps we heard?"

"Maybe we heard wrong."

"Heard wrong? How can we hear wrong? I was listening very carefully."

"....."

"Didn't you say the exorcism was successful? Aren't you a professional? Aren't you different from a 'little girl'? Then what was that sound just then?" I asked Miko-san.

Miko-san stared at me.

"It's just the wind."

Bastard. Would Naru use a sorry excuse like that? When you guys were dissing Naru back there, he didn't make any excuses!

Furious, I glared at Bou-san and Miko-san. They turned away.

At this time, the sound of a door opening and closing came from the second floor.

Bang! Bang!

It sounded as if the building would come crashing down.

Then came the ghostly sounds. Such rough footsteps... It sounds like an army is up there, running around. Every door in the building banged, opening and

closing by itself.

The floor started to sway.

Suddenly the flourescent light we put up earlier on the ceiling cracked open, and little pieces of glass fell.

We scrambled away into the entrance hall and corridor.

I stood in the entrance hall, then turned around and saw the shoe cabinet swaying. A loud cracking sound came from it.

I pushed against the shoe cabinet to keep it from falling. Not sure why I did though. But it's probably because I was scared it'd fall.

As I pushed against the shoe cabinet, I realized it was warm. Warm as hot water.

...Didn’t Naru say something like this earlier?

Objects that poltergeists touch will be warm to the touch...

Wobbling and swaying, the shoe cabinet fell on me. I tried to block it, but it was too heavy and I soon crumbled under its weight.

I screamed.

...And then, I couldn't feel anything...

3

My head hurts.

The cool wind brushed against my cheeks... This feels so good. When I thought of it that way, I woke up.

My eyes fluttered open.

I was in a small, dark place. When my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I realized I was inside Naru's car.

The car... Is it moving?

I wanted to get up, but I didn't have the energy to.

...Ummm.

That's right. The shoe cabinet fell on me. Yeah, that's it. This must be a curse that the injured assistant casted upon me.

I looked around and realized no one was around. Even the driver's seat was empty.

But isn't this car moving?

No... It's not moving. I'm just dizzy.

That's weird. I was just sleeping, but now I feel dizzy.

It feels like the car is spinning. My head hurts.

...Who moved me here? I hope I'm not alone. Then, I tried to sit up, but stopped when a nauseating feeling overcame me. I quickly lay down again.

That's weird... Am I hurt?

The footsteps, the ghostly sounds, the warm shoe cabinet.

What happened after that? How long did I sleep? Where's everybody else...?

Ah, this isn't good. I'm sleepy.

I felt my eyes close tightly...

When I realized my face was moist from sleeping, I woke up with a jerk.

Not good. I feel uncomfortable. Did I get hurt... Feels like my energy was drained. I woke up in a daze.

If I can't get up, and I can't call out for help, I'll be in trouble. How's everyone else? It's so quiet. No one's nearby. The others aren't hurt, are they?

Right when I was determined to get up, a soft, pale hand caressed my forehead.

"Who is it..." My voice was weak.

My eyes looked up past the pale hand. In the darkness I could make out the face.

"...Naru?"

...You're back? Thank goodness.

Naru reassured me with a calm voice. "Don't move."

He said that with a warm smile on his face. I was kind of surprised. I never thought that Naru could smile like that.

Such a warm smile.

"It would be great if you'd always smile like that."

I said automatically, without even thinking about it. Ah, I really don't feel so good. But Naru's cocking his head, smiling down at me.

I asked, "Is anyone nearby?"

"No."

Such a soft voice.

"...Really," I said softly.

...I'm so tired...

"That kinda sucks. It really is a poltergeist... That sucks..." I said.

Naru shook his head. "You should rest for a while. It's best not to get up yet."

"Okay..."

...What's up with Naru. He's being so nice and gentle...

"...Thank you."

Naru shook his head, smiling.

...I woke up.

Looking around, I realized I was in the car. The moonlight faintly shined through. The equipment was piled up in a stack.

My head hurts.

Sleeping on this hard "bed" made my back ache.

...Naru?

Where's Naru?

Naru's not here. Now where did he go?

...Or maybe... That was just a dream.

Yeah— Just a dream.

I was still wearing the same clothes. Looking around, I realized the equipment filled up half the back seat of the van. Who would've thought I'd be lying down over here, in this little tight space.

Eh???

When I started thinking about this, I bumped my head on the top of the car. Bou-san peered through the window, then shouted, "Hey! Are you all right?!"

4

I wasn't sure whether I was lucky or unlucky, but apparently I was the only one who got injured.

After the shoe cabinet fell on top of me, knocking me out, the others took me out. They shouted and shouted, but I just wouldn't come to. As for Miko-san, she said it was too late to help me.

Don't assume I'm dead. That makes me so angry. Still, Miko-san cried for me when she realized I was no longer breathing, so I forgive her.

Everyone gathered at the van. The night air was chilly.

"What time... Is it?" I asked.

"It's four AM. It'll be morning soon."

...Meaning, I've slept for a long time.

"What about Naru? Is he back?"

"No."

Well— That must've been a dream.

...Why would I have this kind of dream?

"Thank goodness Mai-san doesn't have any serious injuries," John said, his voice full of relief.

"Sorry I worried you guys."

"That was a strong poltergeist. It's the first time I encountered a serious situation like this."

"What happened afterwards?" I asked.

Bou-san crossed his arms. "Nothing happened after that. The exorcisms didn't seem to work."

"Oh... What about Kuroda?"

"She left a long time ago."

"Really."

Miko-san whispered, "Seems like this is a big problem. The exorcisms didn't work as planned..."

"Heh, so you admit the exorcism failed?" I teased.

Hearing that, she angrily turned away.

Hee hee hee.

Miko-san jeered, making sure she was loud enough so we could hear. "As for Naru, who knows where he ran off to. Plus, his assistant is such a big burden. We can't rely on the exorcisms, and Bou-san can't do anything..."

"And you?" Bou-san retorted.

"...I don't have the strength to do anything either," she replied hesitatingly. "It's dangerous. Shouldn't we think about our safety first?"

"True."

"Oh, so are you going to run away?" I asked her.

"...So what if I do?" she said, unwilling to admit defeat, "didn't you see how your boss ran away after that incident? He's probably at home now, trembling in fear."

...Hmph.

"...Miko-san, do you mean it?" teased Bou--san. "So, you're not going to cover up for him?"

"What's this about covering up for him? Don't associate me with him. I can't even imagine him running away, trembling like a baby," the woman replied.

Just imagining him doing that is scary.

Bou-san laughed, "True that. We were mean to him yesterday, so it makes sense if he goes home crying."

Stop it!

"That's even worse. Just thinking of that makes a chill go down my spine. That insufferably confident bastard. The only narcissist I respect in the world is hiding under his blanket, crying?!"

Bou-san stopped laughing when my gaze fell on him.

"...That's true..."

"Shibuya-san must be..." John said, as his creativity sparked up as well. "He must be so furious that he's making voodoo dolls."

When Miko-san raised her head, everyone burst out in laughter.

The sky brightened, the sun's bright rays striking the school building from the east.

Chapter 8 - Warning Lifted

1

Naru still didn't come back.

As a thoughtful, excellent girl, I went back to school with my uniform on.

The moment I stepped into the classroom, Kuroda called me.

"Taniyama-san... Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Sorry to worry you."

After sitting down, I was surrounded by Keiko and the others.

"Mai, I heard that yesterday was dangerous."

"How do you know?"

"Kuroda said so. She was bragging about it just now."

...I knew it, I knew it.

Yuuri whispered listlessly, "It must be so lucky having psychic powers... Things would be great if I had them..."

Give it up already. It's dangerous.

Michiru said, "Yeah— That would be awesome. And I would be able to hear Shibuya-san's beautiful voice."

Keiko's expression changed. "True. For a moment there, I was scared when the telephone rang."

...Huh?

I abruptly turned toward Keiko. "What did you just say?"

"I was saying— All three of us got a telephone call last night."

"Was it Naru? When?"

Keiko looked at me, surprise evident on her face. "Last night. You didn't know?"

"No. Naru has been gone since yesterday afternoon. Where was he calling from?"

"He didn't say where he was at."

"Then what did he say?"

Keiko looked at the others, then Michiru quietly answered my question. "He asked a lot of questions. Questions about the old school building. And questions about you."

"Me?"

"Yes. He also asked about the teacher and Kuroda."

...Exactly what did he ask about?

What is that Naru doing, disappearing off for no reason. Just what is he doing?

I was thinking about this when the teacher suddenly came in.

The moment she entered, she announced, "Kuroda, Taniyama, the principal wants to see you."

Huh?

2

Kuroda and I knocked on the door, then entered the classroom.

There were eight people.

In the middle was Naru.

...This guy... Was he here the whole time?

But then I saw the principal, so I waved hello to him. "Sorry we're late..." Then I sat in one of the chairs arranged for us.

What happened? Why did they call us?

Naru stood up. "Is everyone who was involved in this case here and accounted for?"

The principal nodded in response.

Naru told us to relax, turned off the lights, and covered the windows with curtains, sealing the room in darkness.

A light lay on the table, flashing repeatedly like a flickering flashlight.

"Please look at this light."

The room flashed from light to dark.

Naru spoke calmly, "Look at the light. Slowly breathe in and out... Relax your shoulders..."

What a strange atmosphere. The light flashed again and again. Reality seemed to slip away in this illuminated world.

"...Is that me breathing?"

We listened carefully.

Naru's voice was calm, quiet. "Listen carefully to your breathing..."

He repeated it.

...I'm tired... I didn't get enough sleep yesterday, what with the half-awake-half-asleep state I was in...

Naru's soft voice rang through the air. I can hear the fluctuating rhythm of his voice.

—Tonight... Something will happen...

—The chair on the second floor of the old school building... Will move by itself...

—Tonight in the old school building... In the lab room...

The lab room... Chair

.....

"Okay, it's finished."

The room suddenly brightened.

The bright light blinded my eyes.

"...Huh?"

"Thank you for your cooperation."

Naru bowed. There was an old chair beside him.

...The chair...

After leaving the classroom, I called out to Naru before he left for the old school building.

"Naru!"

Naru turned around, his dark blue eyes gazing into mine. He's still that confident.

"Yesterday... Where did you go afterwards?"

"I went to many places... I heard you were injured?"

"Yeah, but nothing serious. Just a bump on my head."

"Poor you. Well, just don't get any dumber and it'll be all right."

...Why you—

"Hey, what was that just now?" I said.

Instead of replying, he shot a question back at me. "Aren't you going back to class?"

"Oh no!"

"...So you want to be an idiot."

...Jerk—

Ready to leave, I waved good-bye to him. But then I just remembered I had to ask him a question. "Naru!"

"What?" he said, a hint of irritation in his voice.

"...This is kind of sudden, but..."

"Ignorant girl."

I didn't say anything yet!

So this is what your manners are like— "Last night, did you come back... Here?"

"Back to the old school building?" Naru looked surprised.

"...You didn't come back then?"

"I just came back."

Darn, that must've been a dream.

Of course— How can Naru be so nice— Naru looked at me, a look of confusion on his face.

I waved my hand, dismissing the idea.

It was a dream— Of course. Yeah, just a dream.

...But, why would I have a dream like that?

.....?

...Can it be...

Hold, hold on for a moment! Hey!

I...I...I must be—!

Ahhh—

3

After school I went to the old school building.

But first I went to the parking lot and found Naru sitting down in his van.

When I saw him through the window, my heart skipped a beat, and I was overfilled with joy.

Hey, how can this be—

I missed my chance to speak.

I'm going to talk! In the same way I always do!

When I tried to gather up the courage to speak, Naru noticed me. He looked at me, his eyes deep and profound.

Not good... I'm blushing.

Naru seemed to be listening to the recordings, but when he saw me he placed his earphones down. "Last night, was it you who helped set these tape recorders up?"

"Yeah... I wanted to set up the camcorders instead, but I didn't know how."

"It's quite impressive of you to be able to record this. There are some rather interesting sounds here."

"So the poltergeist incident from yesterday was recorded?"

"Yes, all of it."

Thank goodness.

"Ah, that's right. The shoe cabinet..."

Hmm? Naru looked my way. It's all right if you don't look at me— "Umm... The... Shoe cabinet... Was warm."

"The one that fell down?"

"Yeah. That's right, objects that poltergeists touch should be warm to the touch.... That's what you said before, right?"

"I'm surprised you remember so clearly."

Wahh~~ He complimented me... No, that's not it.

Naru stood up, then handed me some electrical wires.

"....."

"Set up the equipment."

"Huh?!"

Luckily for me, John passed by and helped Naru instead. John carried the videocamera while Naru carried some kind of machine I've never seen before.

"Hey, what's that?" I asked. When Naru reached the lab room, he placed the machine down and told me to set up the tripod. Then he walked into the room.

Naru pulled an old chair from a corner. The chair was nearly broken.

Then he placed the chair in the middle of the room and started drawing a circle around it.

"What's that?"

A chair in the middle of the room... What kind of spell is that?

After Naru drew the circle, he left the room.

He returned to the van to bring in more equipment. When he came back, I grabbed him.

"Hey, what are you doing this for?"

I asked Naru.

Naru looked around the room for a place to put the camcorder. His face was stoic.

"Hey—"

Ignoring me, he headed towards the hallway.

...What's the meaning of this, you jerk.

So much equipment. Naru set up the expensive equipment.

"Hey— Shibuya-sama, what was that? Did something happen? Tell me already," I implored.

He sighed, crossed his arms, and leaned against the wall. "It's a radar."

"A radar... Like the ones that airplanes use?"

"Correct."

...Oh oh oh.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"I can't say. If I tell you, the results will be meaningless."

"But I'm your assistant..."

"No."

Oh— Selfish guy.

"I'll tell you tomorrow so don't ask until then."

"Well, I have another question."

"What?"

"Did you know the reason behind the hauntings?"

"I'm not sure, but I'm probably not wrong..."

With the exception of what he just told me, Naru didn't say anything else. He wouldn't answer me when I asked him more questions.

John didn't want to see this anymore. "Mai-san, Shibuya-san must be thinking about the case right now. He'll tell you tomorrow so don't ask him anymore. Let's just wait untill tomorrow, okay?"

"...Okay..."

Naru seemed unconcerned about my questions. He went ahead and started to hammer in some nails onto the window sides.

...Is a storm coming?

After he finished, Naru handed calligraphic brushes to me and John.

"Sign your name on the boards, and make sure you write big."

Huh?

You won't answer even if I ask, huh.

Oh well. I bowed to the boards, then signed my name on them.

"Are the windows closed?"

"Yes."

If you knock on the windows, they barely move.

We left the lab room, and Naru closed the door. After he nailed the boards onto the door, sealing it shut, he handed us the calligraphic pens again. "Sign your name on the board."

I signed my name under John's signature.

Afterwards, Naru walked towards his equipment and placed a cleansing tag on it. We signed our names on it again.

Then we finally left.

What was that all about. That kind of work.

Making others do things like that—

4

The next day I went to school early.

I headed straight for the old school building.

Naru had come already. He was sitting in his van, handling something. Someone stood beside him.

Huh?

It's the assistant I injured!

I walked towards the van and knocked. "Good morning."

I was deeply concerned about the assistant. "Is the injury all right?"

The assistant's eyes gazed coldly back at me.

...I was also hit by the shoe cabinet. You didn't...curse me or anything, right?

Naru opened the car door. "You're here rather early today."

"Of course I am."

That's right. Today's "tomorrow". That thing you were doing yesterday. Aren't you going to tell me what it is?

Naru looked impatient.

"Hey, so what's up? What was that thing you were doing yesterday?"

Naru sighed. "Mai, don't you think you talk too much?"

"If you don't want me to tell anyone, I can keep it a secret."

Naru thought about it for a while. "Wait a while. Everyone will be here soon."

Everyone... Meaning? Are you talking about Miko-san and them?

Exactly what are you thinking about?

An arguement broke out moments before everyone came together.

Kuroda came before class started as well.

Like me, she was also pestering Naru for answers. She wanted to know what happened yesterday, so I told her that we'd have to wait for everyone else to come first. Unfortunately, she didn't listen to me and went ahead and picked a fight with Naru.

"Then I'll stay here and wait," Kuroda announced.

"Go home," Naru replied coldly.

In the end Kuroda won the arguement, to which Naru sighed resignedly.

After the school bell rang, Miko-san and the rest quickly scrambled here.

And so, Kuroda and I skipped class.

Well, I guess this is okay too.

Miko-san, Bou-san, John, and Masako came. When the whole team was here, Naru walked towards the old school building.

Naru headed towards the building, one hand supporting his assistant who was using crutches, and one hand holding his camcorder.

"What are you going to show us today?" Bou-san snickered.

Miko-san laughed too. "Maybe we shouldn't go and see. Someone might turn up missing again."

Naru showed no expression on his face.

"I just want some witnesses in my experiment," Naru replied.

"Huh?"

Miko-san and Bou-san were dumbfounded.

When we reached the front of the lab room, I noticed the equipment were in the same place they were yesterday. Naru called John and me, "Look at the equipment. Is the paper with your signature intact?"

What?

Sometime beforehand, Naru had given the assistant the camcorder.

I examined the paper with our signatures. It wasn't damaged in any way, and

my signature was still intact.

"Is everything okay?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"Yes, it's the same as yesterday," John answered.

"What about the signatures on the door? Is it your handwriting?"

"Yes."

"That's right."

Naru nodded, then proceeded to tear down the planks he had hammered onto the door yesterday.

We looked with curiosity.

Naru entered the lab room.

...Huh?

The pink circle drawn in the middle of the floor.

The chair should be in that circle...it should be in the middle of the circle.

But instead, the chair was beside the window.

"Shibuya-san, the chair moved," John informed.

"Yes it did," Naru said, smiling satisfactorily.

Miko-san interjected, "Wait a minute. What's going on here?"

Instead of answering, Naru headed toward the camcorder. After he saw the display screen of the camcorder, he smiled.

"Hey, Naru-chan," Miko-san called out impatiently.

Naru looked at us, a confident glint in his eyes.

"Thank you for your cooperation. Tomorrow I will leave."

Eh? Ehhhhhh?

"You already told us this case was over," Miko-san reminded him sarcastically.

"I did say something like that."

"Land subsidence?"

...What a sarcastic jerk.

But then, Naru nodded, "Yes."

"Haaa!"

Bou-san jeered, "You better stop while you're ahead. Can land subsidence really cause all that?"

"Land subsidence is a sufficient explanation for the case the principal presented me."

"Then, what made the windows shatter? And what caused the strange noises afterwards?!"

...Good point. That's not a sound that land subsidence can make.

"That was a poltergeist."

"Look you!" Miko-san and Bou-san shouted in unison.

"You can't exorcise ghosts, right? So you're just investigating a bit and then calling it a day," Bou-san said, pointing a finger of accusation at Naru.

Naru remained calm, "There is no need to exorcise. I believe that would be unnecessary."

Rewinding his tape, Naru turned toward us, "Do you want to watch?"

We started to watch the recording of the chair. At first the chair was in the middle of the room. We stared intently.

"What're we watching this for?" Miko-san mumbled.

Naru paid no attention to her.

"Hey..." the woman said as the chair in the TV screen began to shake.

The chair shook and shook, then it started to slide across the floor. There was no external force. It just moved by itself to the side of the window. It shook violently, then fell. It didn't move again.

Naru pressed the stop button.

"What... Was that just now?" I asked.

"It's just what you saw."

"The chair moved?"

"Yes, it did move."

...What happened?

Bou-san sighed exasperately, "That was a very strong poltergeist! We must exorcise it immediately..."

Naru replied coldly, "That would be unnecessary."

Naru noticed my confusion, then proceeded to explain, "Yesterday I gave everyone an autosuggestion."

"Huh?"

"It's similar to hypnoticism. The autosuggestion was that this chair would move at night."

...That light... Was like a flashlight.

"So that was hypnoticism?"

Naru nodded in response.

"...Basically, yes. Then I placed the chair here, and with Mai and John's help I locked the doors and windows, and hammered in the wooden planks. Afterwards I proceeded to seal the room. This way, no one would be able to enter. If someone were to enter, we would notice."

"True."

If anyone broke in, they'd have to remove the wooden planks and put new ones there, but then our signatures are there.

Pausing momentarily, Naru looked carefully at each one of us, his eyes darker than the night sky.

"Poltergeist incidents are usually caused by human beings, namely those that are thirteen to fifteen years old. But sometimes they're caused by teenage girls under a lot of stress who want to be noticed by others."

"Are you saying that could be a problem?" I asked.

"Idiot."

...Do you have to evaluate everything I say? Don't say it so bluntly like that.

"It is highly probable. However, the culprit is usually unaware of doing this.

"What?"

"In these situations, an autosuggestion will make the event actually occur."

Autosuggestion... An autosuggestion that the chair will move?

Bou-san interposed, "So you're saying that the chair moved because of a human?"

"Correct."

"And not because of a ghost?" asked Miko-san. "So the activities happening in the old school building were also caused by a human?"

"To put it simply, yes. I have not been mistaken yet."

"...Then the culprit is?"

"Is..."

Naru remained silent.

Someone who wants to feel important. Someone who wants to be noticed.

A person with that strong desire... There was only one such person, and she was right in front of my eyes.

But...

Slowly, my eyes darted towards her.

Everyone else looked at her too.

Kuroda.

"...Me...?"

Kuroda's voice became shaky at first, then firm, "How can that be...!"

She shook her head.

Naru nodded his head.

"You are the prime suspect."

"Are you saying that it's all because of me? That poltergeist?"

Fear showed in her eyes.

"There is a higher possibility that it is you than the others," Naru said, looking at us.

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"You are the first person to talk about the old school building. For instance, you said there were ghosts of soldiers and nurses there. But the fact of the matter is, there never was a hospital here. An air raid never occurred here, and the school was never used as a hospital before."

"How can that be..."

"—To sum it up, you were mistaken or perhaps the rumors got to you. Didn't Miko-san say that you didn't have psychic powers?"

Naru turned towards Miko-san.

"Yes, that's right. I'm sure I wasn't wrong," Miko-san confirmed.

"Whether Kuroda-san did that on purpose or whether she just pretended to see them... Even now I am not so sure," Naru continued to explain.

"I wasn't lying!" Kuroda exclaimed.

"In the beginning I thought that you possessed psychic powers," Naru said as he pulled out the tape recorder from under the table. "I said something like this earlier: half of poltergeist incidents are caused by humans. When the poltergeist activity occurred at the old school building, I was perplexed. The equipment did not show any presence of spirits. Plus, Hara-san didn't sense any."

"Yes, that's correct," Masako said, nodding her head.

"If it's not caused by a spirit, then it must be caused by a human. If this were to happen at somebody's house, then the person responsible would be whoever lives there. It could be a thirteen to fifteen year old or a teenage girl. If you are stressed out, you may unconsciously do this. You unconsciously hope that people do not ignore you and that they notice you instead. And so, the culprit may cause many poltergeist disturbances. Let's say the people in the household get into a fight. You unconsciously believe that you get attention when you are in

an argument. But... No one lives in the old school building."

Silence filled the room.

"It's also possible to take it the opposite way. The person who craves attention would be the culprit of these poltergeist activities. Meaning... The only two people who fit this description is Kuroda-san and... Mai."

...Me?!

Did you just make me a suspect too?!

"If you compare the two, Kuroda-san is the more likely one."

After saying that, Naru stared intensely at Kuroda, who was already blushing furiously. "I heard that your psychic powers have made you rather popular in school. Ever since middle school, you have been admired for them."

"..."

...Michiru and them did say it that way.

"You mentioned earlier that there are spirits in the old school building. But... What if there really were no spirits? Instead of ghosts, it's ground subsidence. What would happen if everyone found out about this?"

Bou-san replied, "Everyone would stop believing her. In the end, they wouldn't be able to trust her again."

Miko-san seemed to feel sorry for her too. "...So at first, you didn't have any psychic powers, but now it's come to this."

"...That's right. In order for Kuroda-san to get everyone's attention, ghosts would have to exist. So to her, ghosts must exist in the old school building."

Everyone looked at Kuroda.

"...What? So that's what you thought this whole time," I whispered. When Kuroda raised her head, I smiled at her. Everyone wants to be special and be admired by others. Everyone wants to be unique and have the approval of others.

So she wants to have the ability to sense ghosts...

"Our investigation could've made Kuroda-san's ghost sightings invalid, which

stressed her. As a result, she was unconsciously under a lot of stress. In her mind she believed that there must be ghosts here, and that poltergeist activities must occur here. And then..."

Bou-san continued, "...she unconsciously made poltergeist activity."

I wondered if they were mistaken. "But can a human really do all that? Like, if a test is approaching and you want the school to collapse, even if you really want the school to collapse, it never does in the end."

"That's an ability problem."

What?

Naru looked back at Kuroda, a gentle look on his face. "I thought she was a latent psychic."

"Psychic?"

"Someone who has psychic powers. Even though she is unaware of it, she may have some PK. I will explain for Mai's sake. PK is a type of psychic energy."

...Shut up, you arrogant...

"Oh..." Miko-san said, looking at Kuroda before turning toward Naru, "then in that case, she felt more stressed because you mentioned ground subsidence. Then how do you explain me getting locked in that room? Did she do that too? And if she didn't, then how do you explain the static in your video? You have to be able to explain that, at least."

Masako said in a low voice, "You locked yourself in."

"What, you're saying that I forgot I locked myself in?"

"Are you saying you didn't?"

Naru halted their argument with his hand, then turned towards Kuroda. "...Allow me to explain."

Kuroda nodded forcefully.

"Now, about Miko-san being locked up," Naru said as he pulled out a nail from his pocket.

"What about it."

"It's a nail."

"I can tell it's a nail by looking. What are you trying to say?"

"This nail was sticking out the door."

...Eh?

"The reason the door wouldn't open is that this nail was stuck in it. I noticed this earlier, but I didn't believe it was necessary to mention it."

Miko-san grabbed the nail from Naru and looked at it carefully.

"So someone put it there on purpose," said Miko-san.

"Right."

"Who could've... Is it you?!" She stared at Kuroda, who shrank back. I couldn't help but pat her shoulder to comfort her.

...Looks like I've become her comforter.

Naru continued, "It was probably a joke. Were you not mean to her earlier?"

...Yup, yup.

"Then, what about the videocam's malfunction?"

"I examined it carefully. Apparently it's caused by a human, not a ghost."

"Did she do that?"

"She was already there when Mai arrived in the lab room, so most likely, yes."

"....."

Miko-san bit her lip.

Kuroda shrank back, then apologized for what she did.

John told her in a comforting tone, "Don't worry about it. Even though it did cause a lot of trouble."

"That's not the problem here! You guys are all rotten!"

Naru replied coldly, "It's because Miko-san insulted her by saying she didn't have psychic powers. That's why she was so angry she couldn't stand it anymore. As a lesson, do not talk carelessly in the future."

...Do you have the right to say that?

"Does everyone understand now?"

Miko-san angrily crossed her arms. "Now we understand. But now what? We can't just leave like this. The principal called on us to exorcise the ghost."

"We can just say that we exorcised the ghost."

"What if Kuroda wants to stop the demolition of the building?" Miko-san snarked, shooting a sharp look at Kuroda.

"I plan to tell the principal this: There were many spirits of soldiers in the old school building. We exorcised them so now it's safe to continue the demolition project—is this okay with you, Kuroda-san?"

Kuroda looked like she was about to shed tears of happiness.

"...Dead soliders... Huh," Miko-san mumbled unhappily.

Bou-san said, "So now there's no problem, right?"

Naru crossed his arms.

"That's right," Masako answered. "But I'm a little worried. How about we tell the principal the truth? Just tell him what you told us."

"She's already under a lot of pressure. There's no need to add to that, right?" Naru responded.

...Oh— you're actually really considerate.

Miko-san asked, "Then who gets the credit of exorcising the ghost?"

At that moment everyone became silent.

Naru calmly responded, "Everyone helped in the exorcism. Will this be alright with everybody?"

"...Huh?"

Miko-san turned her gaze toward Naru, "...So you do have your merits. Are you going to divide the credit among us?"

With his arms crossed, Naru shot a sharp look at me, "Mai, don't tell anyone about this."

"I know."

Miko-san seemed touched by this, "You're quite the gentleman."

"Thank you."

"Hey... Do you have a girlfriend?"

"...I don't understand."

"I can repress myself, even if it is with a young one," she purred.

"Thank you for your kind offer."

...Seductive miko. Exactly how is she like a miko? How?!

Naru smiled slightly, "I appreciate your kind offer; however, I am already too used to looking at myself in the mirror."

Miko-san's face turned stark red.

...Huh?

Bou-san burst out in laughter while Miko-san looked the other way.

...So he refused Miko-san's offer because he's too used to looking at himself in the mirror?

Hey, then that means Miko-san was completely rejected. But did you have to say it that way?

Why don't you just change into a narcissus then.

6

Naru suddenly lifted his camcorder and headed out the door.

Everyone looked at him in surprise. He looked back at us with his deep eyes. "Aren't you going to prepare to leave?"

"Yeah, that's right," Miko-san said, standing up, "this wasn't exactly a really big case."

Bou-san injected, "But weren't you scared to death earlier?"

"Don't joke with me."

...Preparations to leave.

Hearing Naru say that, I felt really empty.

I'm just a normal student. I became his temporary assistant because his original one was injured.

Meaning... The thing that bought us together is gone now.

Maybe we'll never see each other again.

When I think of it that way, I felt a lump form in my throat. We'll never see each other again. I'll live my life, and Naru will live his. We'll never have a chance to see each other again.

I have to say something.

I watched Naru lift the equipment into the hallway. He turned around and looked at me, "Don't you two have to go to school today?"

"I'm not going today," I replied.

Naru immediately shot me a disdainful look.

"Why don't you put more effort into becoming smarter?"

...Why you..

Why do I care about this.

Naru never even thought about us not being able to see each other again. I'd hoped he'd think about it a little. Even if it was just a short time, at least I was his assistant.

...Even though it wasn't anything serious. The original assistant is on crutches now, but he can still move around.

Eh— I'm kinda angry.

...Why am I the only one feeling lonely?

For some reason, I stared at Naru's back as he walked away. He turned around and called out, "If you're not going to class, then help me move the equipment back."

Ah— Even in the end you can't help but make me suffer.

Without saying anything, Kuroda walked back to class, hanging her head down in shame.

I helped Naru move the equipment back into the van. I really had to say something.

Should I say, "Please tell me your address" or something like that? No, I just can't bring myself to say it.

Naru rolled up the last of the electrical wires and lifted it into his arms. There shouldn't be anything left in the lab room.

"Mai, you can go back to class now."

Naru still acted the same way.

...Okay...

You... You really don't feel it at all.

Ah, I really hate you!

"Well then, I'm going back to class," I declared.

"Okay."

"Are you going to see me off?" I softly asked.

"Why would I?"

...Why? What do you mean why.

"That's what I thought. Since our time together was short, but you're just like Bou-san—"

"There's no need to. You better hurry and get to class. If you get any dumber, not even the best medicine can help you."

...You jerk!

Really now. I get it now!

I'm going to class then! Since you're not going to see me off anyway! From now on, I don't want to be associated with you anymore!

I definitely won't think about you, you idiot— I finally calmed down and returned to class. It was spring, and my chair was near the window. The open window faced the old school building, and I couldn't help but look back at it.

I gazed at it.

It was quiet. The old school building's windows distorted. The remaining glass was covered by white dust. A cracking sound emanated from the building, followed by the sound of shattering glass. I couldn't help but get up and walk toward the window.

The teacher called on me to sit down, but then stopped when she heard the sound of the glass shattering. Noise filled the room as everyone started talking at the same time.

I saw the building shake. The roof on the west started to fall, followed by the rest of the building, creating a cloud of yellow dust. The west side looked like it was going to completely break down.

The building let out one final sound as it collapsed.

The left side of the building slowly sank. It was like as if a sand funnel or a hole in the ground was sucking it in. The entire building toppled like a ship sinking into the ocean.

Taking advantage of the situation, I moved away from the window and left the

classroom while everyone was still focused on the collapsing building outside.

I ran toward the old school building.

The silver van was no longer there.

In the midst of the crowd, I did not find the one person I was looking for.

The nasty ghost hunter had left.

A few days later, the demolition project restarted to tear down the part of the building left standing. At the same time, rumors of Kuroda's psychic abilities spread throughout the school...

Epilogue

"Hey, what's Shibuya-san doing now?" asked Keiko.

Keiko gazed at the window.

Outside, the machine that tore down the old school building lay looming. The demolition was complete.

"Mai, why didn't you ask him for his address? You could've at least gotten his phone number—"

...Shut up.

Michiru was also gazing at the window.

"I looked through the phone book, but it wasn't there," I responded.

...That's right. "Shibuya Psychic Research" wasn't in the business section of the phone book. There wasn't a section of psychics in the Town Pages either. And usually businesses aren't in the Hello Pages. (Although I did take a look.) When I asked the operator, she just gave me a cold reply: "If there is no address, then there is no way for me to look it up."

Keiko said, "Well, since the principal called him in, he must know the guy's address. Go ask him."

"How about you go ask?" Michiru replied coldly.

"Eh— How do I ask him?" replied Keiko.

"I don't want to ask either."

"But."

...I thought about asking the principal too. But, how do I do it?

Well, it's not like I don't have an excuse. I can just say I want to return something he forgot to him.

But, what do I say after I phone him? Naru will definitely use his normal voice and ask, "What did you call for?"

"Hey, Mai, just go and ask the principal already—"

"I don't have any reason to look for him," I replied.

"Man— You're being so cold," Keiko said depressingly.

Man— Don't say it anymore.

I don't want to think about Naru right now. I'm only coping with this because you guys keep blabbering on and on about it.

"Hey Mai..." Michiru called, walking toward me.

"Don't bother me," I said, walking away.

"Wait, just hear me out. You have a very good reason to..."

Don't bother me!

I don't want to say it anymore. I almost felt like crying.

"He has nothing to do with me," I insisted. "You two can go on fawning over him over there."

"What— How cold—"

Suddenly the intercom came on.

"Taniyama Mai of class 1-F, please report to the principal's office."

...What happened?

Standing up, I thought about it, pulling Michiru and Keiko's attention toward me.

I thought about what will happen in the principal's office.

"Um, I'm Taniyama," I said once I reached his office.

"Ah, Taniyama-san? You have a phone call."

The secretary motioned toward the phone on the counter.

Telephone call? From the school?

"Hello, I'm Taniyama."

Who is it?

"Mai?"

.....

This... Voice...

I couldn't help but be startled.

"Mai?"

"Yes! It's me!"

"You don't need to shout. I can hear you clearly."

...Ah— This tone.

It's Naru...

"Why did you call the school?"

"Wouldn't you think it's because I don't know your home number?"

Why does he need to talk so arrogantly. I was so happy I nearly cried. Why... Why would Naru call me.

"...Is something up?"

I tried hard to hold back my emotions and remain calm.

"Compensation."

"...Huh?"

"I'm talking about your payment as my assistant. It's okay if you don't want it."

...Ah, is that it...

As I sighed, my eyes seem to cloud over.

...So it's business related.

"I never thought I'd get paid. But if you'll give it to me, I'll gladly take it."

I'm taking it. I'm definitely taking it.

Stupid Naru.

"Then, I'll transfer it to your bank account. Do you know your account

number?"

...Account number?

"How would I remember that. And don't forget, I'm at school right now."

"...Then I'll mail it to you."

...Mail it?

Hey, the least you can do is use this as an excuse to see me again.

"Sure, just do whatever."

"In that case, tell me your address."

Hee hee. I told him my address.

The envelope will definitely have the sender's address on it.

Maybe he'll even use his home address. And then I'll just carelessly pay him a visit, and be asked in his cold tone, "What are you here for?"

But, I'll just leave it like this.

"—Ok, well, it'll be there in a week."

"Okay."

"And, Mai?"

"Wh—at—" My voice almost ran out of energy. Ha ha ha...

"Does your school prohibit its students from working?"

"Nope."

"...Oh, in that case."

"Ah—?"

"Do you want to work here?"

...Huh? ...Work...?

...Work?

"Work in Naru's office?!"

I couldn't help but grasp the phone with all my strength.

"—I don't have enough office workers. A while earlier, someone quit."

"...I'll do it!"

I'll do it! I'll do anything!

"Then, why don't you come over and look over things. The address is..."

I eagerly scribbled down the address.

...A dream. This is a dream.

"Can you find a time to come?"

"How about the day after tomorrow, Saturday."

Now would be an okay time too.

"Then, on Saturday, come on your spare time."

Ah, I'm so happy. What do I do.

"Ah— One more thing."

"Eh?"

"—Thank you for helping earlier. You were a big help. Thank you very much."

...I'm even feeling embarrassed.

My head was spinning. That was the first time I heard him speak not in a cold tone, but in a nice, thankful tone.

I was so touched I was rendered speechless.

"Then, I'll see you on Saturday."

"Okay."

I finally had the energy to speak again.

"I'll see you Saturday!"